

Evaluation of SNH programme of advice for designated site management





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COMMISSIONED REPORT

Commissioned Report No. 569

Evaluation of SNH programme of advice for designated site management

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COMMISSIONED REPORT

Summary

Evaluation of SNH programme of advice for designated site management

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Background

In 2009 SNH initiated a series of workshops and subsequent programme of management advice to maintain favourable condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Natura sites and to provide support to bring sites in unfavourable condition into sympathetic management. Between 2009 and 2012 the advisory programme offered support to around 350 owners and occupiers of designated sites. An in-house statistical evaluation was undertaken by the programme manager in 2012, drawing on copy management plans, feedback from land managers and data from the SNH remedy database. In November 2012 SNH commissioned an independent evaluation of the advisory programme. The aims of the evaluation were to identify outputs and outcomes of the programme and assess achievements against the programme objectives. The evaluation aimed to identify factors underpinning successes and shortcomings of the programme, to investigate the role of management advice in improving and maintaining the condition of designated sites, and to provide recommendations for future advisory initiatives for owners and occupiers of designated sites.

A three-pronged approach was adopted to collect the required qualitative and quantitative information. This involved telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of 31 owners and occupiers who had been offered advice or invited to workshops through the advisory programme, telephone interviews with a selection of eight SNH staff, and consultation with advisors commissioned by SNH to deliver the advice using an electronic questionnaire. More detailed telephone interviews were carried out with a small sample of respondents. A workshop involving over 40 SNH staff involved in the designated site management and/or SRDP was held to discuss the results of the evaluation, and to explore future options and recommendations.

Main findings

- The designated sites advisory programme is recognised by most SNH staff as a key mechanism to help SNH at local and national level achieve its targets in terms of encouraging more designated sites into favourable condition.
- The neutrality of external advisors, their established “street cred” and understanding of day to day practical land management, is widely welcomed by most owners/occupiers.

- Advice was particularly successful in raising awareness of the species and features of interest, condition and management requirements for designated sites not previously under management agreement.
- Involvement of an experienced independent advisor can complement SNH staff skills and help persuade otherwise reticent owners/occupiers to consider positive management changes for designated sites, but even the best of advisors are often limited by the current financial support framework.
- Of the 31 owners/occupiers interviewed, two had declined offers of advice and a further three had declined invitations to a diffuse pollution workshop; usually because they did not see advice as relevant to their own holding.
- 11 of the owners/occupiers interviewed (35.5% of those who had received advice) had subsequently had SRDP applications approved which included management to maintain or bring designated sites into favourable condition. Of these, six had previously been managed under SNH agreement, two transferred from other expiring agri-environment schemes, and three sites had not previously been in a scheme. The highest rate of success in terms of advice leading to an SRDP application (or SNH management agreement where the project was ineligible) has been where owners/occupiers have had a prior SNH management agreement or been involved in a previous agri-environment scheme.
- Management remained unchanged on 14 (35%) of the sites managed by owners/occupiers interviewed who had received advice.
- Factors identified as being most influential on uptake of advice included attitude to conservation, previous experience with agri-environment schemes and SNH, perceived benefits of implementing advice, practicality of management recommendations and how well these fitted with commercial land management.
- The costs and complex application process of SRDP are a major limitation on advisory uptake. Survey responses suggest that had advisors been able to prepare SRDP applications free of charge as part of the package commissioned by SNH, another three (10%) of the owners/occupiers interviewed would have brought sites into more sympathetic management by signing up to SRDP.
- Retrospective payment for capital work through SRDP is another major limitation on implementation of advice. Another two of the 31 owners/occupiers interviewed would have taken forward recommendations had SRDP not presented significant cash flow issues in implementing management recommendations.
- Other inherent limitations of SRDP provide further disincentive to implementation of advice delivered through the advisory programme, in particular insufficient financial incentive, level of bureaucracy and lack of flexibility to tailor options to management requirements of designated sites.
- Many owners/occupiers feel that the added responsibility perceived as accompanying designated sites should be reflected in increased financial incentives to support sympathetic management.
- Suggestions for improved financial support include dedicated funding for capital work on designated sites which is readily accessible without application cost to owners/occupiers, and can be fine-tuned to fund bespoke management, including direct payment for work to avoid cash flow issues.

- Few amongst those interviewed expressed demand for further advice or for training, but the evaluation suggests there is clearly a need for further advice and hand-holding of owners/occupiers to bring designated sites into more favourable condition.
- The majority of owners/occupiers, advisors and SNH staff consulted believe that free 1:1 visits delivered by independent local advisors is the best way forward. A minority of owners/occupiers and SNH staff believe that it would be more cost effective for SNH to reallocate resources to enable the advisory programme to be delivered using suitably experienced existing SNH staff. A limited number of SNH area staff already prepare specialist plans for owners/occupiers but the number of cases is limited by staff time available.
- Funding of more follow-up visits would help increase positive dialogue between stakeholders and may help identify and support more positive management options on complex sites, particularly those in multi-ownership or management, but will not necessarily resolve sites where lack of appropriate funding, or problems with SRDP, are the main reason for failure to implement advisory recommendations.
- Review of the third of the advisory programme's objectives, namely to update available data on designated sites, was not one of the evaluation's main aims. However, the complications of obtaining up to date contacts for o/o to arrange survey interviews and survey results suggest that there is still considerable scope for improvement in this respect.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

As part of its remit to secure the conservation and enhancement of Scotland's natural heritage, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) aims to bring all designated nature conservation sites into favourable condition. In 2008-9, SNH funded a programme of workshops targeted at owners and occupiers (o/o) of designated sites to raise awareness of opportunities for sympathetic management through the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). Although the workshops were generally well received, it was soon recognised that more proactive, personalised advice was required to solve site-specific issues and increase uptake of the scheme. In 2009-10, SNH appointed a number of agri-environment consultants on short-term contract to provide one-to-one advice to o/o of a pre-identified list of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Natura sites. Between 2009 and 2012, the designated sites advisory programme offered support to around 350 o/o responsible for managing a diverse range of habitats and species, widely distributed around Scotland. Further details of the mechanics of the programme are summarised in Section 2.

During 2012, Marie Pages Gold undertook a statistical evaluation of the advisory programme in her capacity as programme manager (see section 6.1). To complement this internal quantitative evaluation, in November 2012 SNH commissioned a short-term contract to conduct an independent evaluation of the advisory programme. Following competitive tender, the contract was awarded to Vyv Wood-Gee, Countryside Management Consultant.

1.2 Objectives of designated sites advisory programme

SNH defined three main objectives for the designated sites advisory programme:

1. To sustain the long-term implementation of remedy mechanisms on designated sites in order to maintain or progress towards the favourable condition target:
 - a. Increase owners' and occupiers' sense of stewardship and responsibility towards the sites by raising awareness of the designation status, features, ecological challenges and appropriate management as well as regulations and cross-compliance requirements.
 - b. Identify viable management solutions by exploring practical solutions that fit owners' and occupiers' aspirations for their land and business, and by identifying costs and benefits.
 - c. Increase positive dialogue between stakeholders (e.g. o/o, agencies, local communities etc.)
2. To support the implementation of the SRDP:
 - a. Raise awareness and understanding of relevant schemes among potential beneficiaries.
 - b. Increase uptake of Rural Development Contract (RDC) – Rural Priorities (RP) (and Land Managers Options) to address unfavourable condition.
 - c. Improve the quality of applications submitted to SRDP.
 - d. Support the transfer of expiring agreements into the SRDP.
 - e. Provide feedback from land managers to SRDP administrators.
3. To update available data on designated sites.
 - a. Clarify the factors affecting the condition of the sites and remedy mechanisms.

- b. List current o/o and report relationship status between relevant parties.
- c. Document present management.

1.3 Evaluation aims

The aims of the evaluation of the designated sites advisory programme, as defined in the project brief, were:

- (i) “to identify the outputs and outcomes from the programme of advice and assess achievements against its main objectives. It is expected that the project will only cover objectives 1 and 2 described above. The project will particularly focus on collecting qualitative information from land managers, external consultants and SNH officers involved in the advisory programme;
- (ii) identify the key ingredients of success and failure of the programme;
- (iii) investigate the role of management advice in improving/maintaining the condition of designated sites and identify land managers’ specific needs for advice;
- (iv) provide recommendations for future advisory initiatives for o/o of designated sites.”

1.4 Evaluation methodology

In order to explore the many different facets of the advisory programme, a three-pronged survey approach was adopted as summarised below. It was stressed to o/o, advisors and SNH staff consulted that the evaluation was categorically not about assessing the effectiveness of individual advisors, but sought to establish the successes and shortcomings of the advisory programme overall and scope for improvement.

1.4.1 Land owner/manager survey

Telephone interviews were conducted with 31 o/o of sites included in the advisory programme to explore how and why they had responded to offer of advice, and what influence advice has had on management and condition of designated sites. The questionnaire used as the basis for interviews (Annex 1) was approved by SNH and piloted with an initial o/o before being finalised.

The sample for inclusion in the evaluation survey was drawn from the list supplied by SNH of 121 sites included in the advisory programme (15 of which were diffuse pollution catchments relating to SSSIs). The sample was stratified to reflect proportionate regional distribution of sites between SNH regions, and to reflect respective proportions of site according to dominant vegetation/habitat type (lowland, upland, open water, wetland, woodland, coastal, catchment area), with minor modification at SNH’s request to ensure a more representative sample from certain areas in respect of habitats such as woodland which have proved particularly challenging to bring into positive management. SNH provided tenure details for each of the chosen sample sites, with numerous different contacts listed for the majority, including site owners, tenants, managers and others with a vested interest. An introductory letter was sent to one contact for each site, followed within two weeks by a phone call to arrange telephone interviews. Alternative sites identified during the initial sample stratification were substituted where necessary, for example where contact could not be established by phone. The sites covered by the o/o survey are listed in Annex 2.

Other than sites for which area offices provided specific further information, for most of the sites included in the survey there was no indication of which contacts were most relevant to a specific site, or had been offered or received advice. As such, the o/o survey was a random sample, including a small number of o/o who had declined workshop invitations or

offer of advice, some who had subsequently applied to SRDP, or decided to change management without financial support, and others who had chosen not to implement advice or proceed with SRDP. The wide variation in response to advice evidenced by interviews with more than one o/o for several sites confirms that although the survey responses provide very useful insights, it would be misleading to attempt to produce statistically valid projections from the survey responses.

1.4.2 External advisor survey

Each of the 21 external advisors contracted by SNH to deliver advice through the programme were invited to complete an electronic questionnaire (Annex 3) designed to help evaluate the mechanisms of the advisory programme itself, and what improvements could be made to bring more designated sites into favourable condition. In total 14 responses were received (66% of advisers involved in the programme) from advisors scattered all around Scotland who had advised on a very wide range of different sites and habitats. Five of the advisors who responded were subsequently interviewed over the telephone to explore in more detail their experience, views and suggestions as to how the advisory programme might be improved in future.

1.4.3 SNH staff survey

SNH area/regional operational staff who have been involved in the advisory programme were invited by email to share their experiences and views. Telephone interviews were subsequently conducted with eight of the staff who volunteered, selected to represent different SNH areas. Interviews followed an outline structure agreed between the consultant and SNH, exploring site selection process, staff input to the advisory programme, information received, and perceived effects of the advisory programme on site condition, SRDP applications and SNH's relationship with owners and occupiers. Email comments specific to certain of these points were received from a further three members of SNH staff.

1.4.4 SNH workshop

A workshop involving SNH operational staff and members of the SNH SRDP delivery team was held at Battleby on 6th February 2013 to present the results and conclusions of the evaluation and provide opportunity for further discussion with SNH staff of future options.

2. MECHANICS OF THE ADVISORY PROGRAMME

An understanding of the basic mechanics of how the advisory programme worked is essential to set the evaluation in context, and to considering scope for improvement.

2.1 Site selection process for inclusion in the advisory programme

SNH area staff were invited by the programme manager to put forward an annual list of sites for inclusion in the advisory programme, with the emphasis on making best use of limited resources (i.e. advisory visit allocation), both to achieve targets of getting as many designated sites as possible into more favourable condition, and in terms of maximising SRDP uptake. Precisely how this general aim was interpreted or applied varied between areas, but generally included:

- sites with expiring SNH management agreements;
- sites where it was felt involvement of a third party could potentially make a positive difference, e.g. where SNH lacked necessary understanding of hill farming issues or management practice, or where the o/o were basically sympathetic but not happy to negotiate with SNH;
- sites where o/os were considered likely to be the most responsive to intervention by an independent third party advisor, based on track record of past responses;
- sites where the management of the designated feature was considered eligible (in principle) for SRDP;
- sites where it was felt condition was unlikely to improve, and no change would happen, by any other mechanism e.g. sites where SNH felt it had “failed” due to breakdown in communication or other reason;
- most vulnerable sites;
- sites where it was felt there was most scope for positive improvement either because of expressed interest from the o/o or in physical terms, which were considered likely to yield a positive outcome to an advisory visit.

For most of the sites targeted through the advisory programme, SNH had already “had a go” at resolving management issues, including previous visits, but for one reason or another had failed to secure commitment to positive management. In some areas, the majority of selected sites were proposed as a “last ditch” attempt to resolve longstanding issues. Concentration on more complex sites and/or those with some “past history” in terms of communication or other issues inevitably has a bearing on the evaluation results.

Consultation with SNH staff revealed that some SNH areas have adopted a completely different approach. For example Southern Scotland Dumfries office deliberately excluded sites with a difficult history which they felt it was unfair to ask or expect an external advisor to try and resolve, and which were unlikely to yield a productive outcome.

Where demand for advisory visits exceeded available resources, the programme manager had an internal system for prioritising individual sites. All areas would have welcomed scope to commission more advisory visits, if resources allowed.

2.2 Appointment of advisors

Contracts for delivery of advice were advertised and managed by SNH at national level. All of the commissioned advisors had a well established track record of advising land owners and managers, the majority having worked for FWAG for many years either until its demise or at some point in their career before becoming independent.

2.3 SNH staff input to advisory programme

SNH involvement in the rest of the advisory programme process appears to have varied considerably. In some areas SNH staff provided external advisors with a ready-collated dossier for each target designated site including written details of contacts, features and management issues, a diary of previous contact, and copies of previous correspondence or agreements. In other areas, the advisor appears to have been given a relatively fluid list of sites, which have been discussed face to face with SNH staff, and the advisor has then been offered access to files to identify contact information and site details themselves, supplemented by further discussion with staff to identify outstanding issues of which SNH was aware.

In some cases SNH staff sent an introductory letter to o/o with forewarning that an independent advisor would be in touch, but in the majority of cases advisors made the initial contact with the o/o, usually by letter followed up by a phone call to arrange a visit.

Most advisors preferred to arrange and conduct the initial visit independently so that they could start with a clean slate. Numerous also commented that this allowed o/o to be less inhibited in raising questions or concerns without a statutory agent present.

2.4 Advisory delivery

Initially the advisory programme was designed to offer one-off general advice designed to raise awareness of sites and designations, and to identify ways forward and encourage applications to SRDP where relevant. Internal SNH review of the 2009-10 advisory programme concluded that such one-off advice was insufficient to inspire or support SRDP application or management improvement on most sites, and that follow-up visits by an advisor or SNH area staff would be necessary to sustain momentum. The conclusion was that more explicit support in the form of production of detailed management plans was required to help support improved management of designated sites in unfavourable condition.

Between 2010 and 2013, the advisory programme was refined to focus resources on maintaining ongoing dialogue, facilitating group discussions between stakeholders and identifying appropriate management and practical solutions to keep sites in favourable condition or initiate progress. In most cases this has taken the form of a free visit by an advisor to discuss the ecological and management issues relating to their site, followed by preparation of a specialist management plan documenting the most appropriate management for the habitats and species of notified interest. To encourage consistency, SNH introduced a template for management plans (Annex 4), a copy of which when completed was given to the o/o, and a duplicate copy sent to SNH. The intention was that the management plans produced by advisors as the key written output of their visit(s) would provide the basis for SRDP applications. Advisors were not commissioned by SNH to produce or submit SRDP applications on behalf of o/o as this might have been construed as giving unfair advantage to applicants in competitive assessment involving SNH. The exception to this is the Western Isles corncrake contracts issued in 2012, which because of the limited scope of the project, were not included within the evaluation.

Between 2009 and 2013, in collaboration with SEPA, a combination of awareness raising workshops and on-farm 1:1 advice has also been commissioned through the designated sites advisory programme to tackle diffuse pollution from agricultural sources affecting the condition of freshwater sites.

3. SUMMARY SURVEY RESULTS

The survey responses summarised below include responses from all those consulted in the course of the evaluation, including interviews with o/o, SNH staff and external advisors, as well as advisor questionnaire responses.

3.1 Response to offer of advice and workshop invitation

Of the 31 o/o interviewed through the survey, two had declined offer of advice, three had declined invitation to a workshop, and the remaining 26 had all received advice. Piloting of the o/o questionnaire soon revealed that many of the o/o included on SNH's database had no recollection of being offered or having received advice through SNH's conservation land management advisory programme, particularly those who had previously or subsequently received advice from either the same or a different advisor not specific to the designated site. Few, if any, related advice or visits they had received to SNH's wider advisory programme, and few other than those with expiring SNH management agreements recognised the purpose of the visit. To some extent this reflects the gradual evolution of the advisory programme. None of the o/o interviewed were able to differentiate between whether they had received a general advisory visit or more specialist or detailed advice. Only a few o/o, notably all of whom had gone forward with SRDP applications, remembered a management plan having been produced.

3.1.1 *Factors affecting o/o agreement to an advisory visit*

Most o/o welcomed SNH taking an interest in the SSSI and the offer of free advice, as a result of which they were prepared to agree to a visit provided there was no obligation to implement recommendations. Other factors identified as having positively influenced acceptance of an advisory visit included:

- 'honest broker' identity of an independent non-SNH advisor coming in, with no axe to grind;
- ability of advisor to win confidence and trust, which depends largely on their personality;
- already knowing and trusting the advisor from previous advisory work or other contact;
- free advice on funding opportunities and access to SRDP (and potential extra income therefrom);
- offer of someone to deal with SRDP application;
- benefits to the farm such as fencing, enhanced grazing by scrub/rhododendron clearance;
- chance to air concerns about SSSI and lack of funding;
- follow-up phone call rather than just a letter;
- crofters and small scale land managers who are unlikely to pay an annual subscription for SAC advice particularly welcome free 1:1 advisory visits.

Amongst the o/o interviewed, attitude to conservation and perceived custodial role in relation to land ownership or management were evidently significant in response to offer of advice. There was no evident correlation between response to offer of advice or workshop invitation and factors such as size of holding, tenure, type of enterprise, position on the holding, or presence of other designated sites, nor the extent to which SSSI designation affected or constrained management.

3.1.2 *Reasons for o/o declining advice*

Comments made by o/o in response to questions during telephone interviews demonstrate why some had chosen to decline offer of advice, and why even some of those who had agreed to a visit were not inclined to change management as a result.

“It’s been like that for decades. Who is to tell us it should be managed any differently, or who is to know that is going to help wildlife?”

“What’s the point in anyone coming to see us to try and tell us to do something we’ve no intention of doing?”

Other responses included:

- too busy trying to make a living / getting on with everyday farming/land management;
- not relevant to farm/business;
- no interest in managing the site, or in conservation;
- fear of interference and loss of control;
- perception of SSSI as being restrictive;
- lack of understanding of the need for positive management, or disagreement with management which they think might be suggested;
- poor relationship or previous breakdown in relationship with SNH, SEPA or other government bodies in general. Those with previous negative experience with the SSSI notification, monitoring and management process were far less likely to agree to visits or advice;
- insufficient financial incentives;
- heavy focus on SRDP, lack of interest in SRDP, poor reputation of SRDP;
- lack of interest in signing up to any kind of management agreement or commitment to management.

3.1.3 *Workshops*

As workshops were included within the advisory programme, at SNH’s request these were also included in both the o/o and advisor questionnaires used for the evaluation. However, interviews with o/o revealed that few had any recollection of ever having been invited to a workshop, and even those that had attended felt that it was too long ago (most were held in 2008-9) to be able to recall sufficient detail to respond meaningfully to questions about the most or least useful aspects of the workshop. None felt workshops had influenced their attitude to SSSIs, or directly affected management on the ground.

All of the advisors consulted during the evaluation commented that even those workshops which were well attended were generally preaching to the converted and were not particularly effective in engaging o/o who had not previously received advice. The workshops initially organised through the advisory programme aimed at raising awareness of SRDP mainly attracted those who already knew something about the scheme, or who wanted to find out whether proposals which they already had in mind might be eligible for funding. Those with no pre-existing interest in changing management of designated sites or land management practices more generally (as required in respect of diffuse pollution) were highly unlikely to attend, no matter how much effort is invested into personally targeting workshop invitations. Several advisors also commented that targets for the number of people expected to attend some meetings were unobtainable.

The advisor who had organised and delivered the three more recent workshops focusing on the Loch Leven catchment felt that these events had served a very useful role in awareness

raising of causes and potential solutions to diffuse pollution. As such, it might be worth organising similar events during the early stages of an education or advisory programme in other catchments, but ultimately the only real way to influence management on the ground was by 1:1 advisory visits which helped land managers translate into practice how the general principles apply to their holding.

3.1.4 *Reasons for declining workshop invitation*

The contact list provided by SNH for the advisory programme in the Loch Leven catchment was based on the workshop invitation list, without any indication of who had subsequently attended or received advice. From the random sample of o/o selected from the list, none had attended the workshop. Reasons why they had not accepted the invitation included:

- fear that workshops were a front for SNH or SEPA trying to hook them into something or pin them down with further regulations and restrictions;
- not considered relevant to their farm/land/holding;
- other types of land use and management considered to have more of an impact on diffuse pollution or eutrophication e.g. building development.

3.2 **Effect of advice on physical management**

Table 1: Summary of o/o responses to effect of advice on physical management (n= 26 o/o interviewed who had received advice)

Q: Has the advice you received	Response (no. survey respondents)	
	Yes	No
Led to a change in physical site management?	8	18
Changed wider farm management?	4	22

3.2.1 *Effect of advice on SSSI management*

Only 30% of o/o interviewed acknowledged that advice provided led to a positive change in physical site management, but this excluded those who were already sympathetically managing a site included in the advisory programme to help transfer to SRDP from a pre-existing SNH management agreement or expiring agri-environment scheme. Annex 5 provides a summary of the outcome of advice offered through the programme. Overall advice had resulted in positive change in management of 11 of those interviewed (35% of those interviewed who had received advice).

Elsewhere during interviews, o/o were asked how important advice had been in deciding what to do. Half of respondents said that advice was critical, many commenting that they wouldn't have known what to do otherwise, either in terms of sympathetic management or applying to SRDP. The majority of the others who felt advice was less important noted that advice might not necessarily have led to a change in physical management, but had confirmed that what they were doing was right, and helped concentrate their minds on how to maintain sympathetic management. Numerous advisors endorsed this view in noting that for some o/o, little management change was required on the ground, and it was more a matter of encouraging continuation of good management practices. None of the SNH staff

interviewed felt able to comment on the extent to which the advisory programme had affected site condition.

“Once we’d taught SNH how things work on farms, we managed to agree management which did what they wanted and fitted in for us, but we would never have done that without the advisor’s help. It needs someone independent to explain how farming works to SNH, and to translate into language farmers can understand what’s needed for conservation.”

Only one or two respondents felt that advice had not really helped them decide what was right or wrong, and remained unclear whether they were under any obligation to implement advice.

Many of the advisors consulted during the evaluation commented that advice would have had a much greater effect in changing SSSI management on the ground had provision been made for follow-up support, and with a more effective delivery mechanism than SRDP. Advisors also noted that advice needed to be delivered on site in 1:1 visits in order to effectively change management.

3.2.2 *What would have happened without advice*

No matter what encouragement was given during interviews to o/o to be honest about what would have happened without advice, some were inevitably reticent to admit that they would have done the same regardless. Others found it hard to predict what might have happened.

Advisors suggest that in most cases where there was no pre-existing management agreement, management would have stayed the same as previously, in which case sites would have stayed in unfavourable condition or deteriorated further (particularly where grazing too intensively or insufficiently were the dominant issue). On many sites with expiring management agreements or agri-environment schemes, lack of advice to help transfer to SRDP would have resulted in cessation of positive management, leading to deterioration in site condition, for example where scrub control is necessary on maritime heath, or where increased summer grazing is necessary to support corncrake on west coast grassland sites. One o/o said that without advice necessary to help negotiate a new management agreement with SNH, the low level grazing which helped maintain site condition would either have been abandoned (i.e. all the stock pulled off) or significantly intensified. Only if o/o have a keen interest in conservation and/or are personally interested in management which coincides with recommendations to improve site condition are they likely to have paid for independent advice to help them improve management.

3.2.3 *Effect of advice on wider farm management*

Advice had led to changes in wider farm management on only four farms or crofts (15% of those interviewed), and most of these were relatively minor effects by default rather than deliberate decision to change management. For example, restricted grazing of a 1 acre portion of a much larger SSSI had increased stocking density on other parts of the croft, but the number of sheep involved was only five or six, and then only for limited periods. Advisors also noted that positively changing wider land management required a broader approach which differed from the specific advice on designated sites which they had been contracted to deliver under the advisory programme.

Only one of the farms interviewed noted that advice had a much more significant effect in having changed overall practice to more targeted nutrient application and soil testing to reduce diffuse pollution across the whole farm rather than solely the SSSI.

3.3 Personal factors affecting implementation of advice

An understanding of factors affecting implementation of advice is important to considering how SNH can most beneficially influence condition of designated sites. The questionnaire survey of o/o included numerous direct questions about influences on land and water management, attitude to conservation, awareness and understanding of designated site status and condition, and perception of limitations imposed by designated status. The draft questionnaire included these questions early on in the interview, which was intended to set the scene before asking for specific details, although it soon became apparent that many respondents were suspicious of these personal questions, which were better asked at the end of the interview, or slotted in at various points when they arose spontaneously during conversation. Factors identified in the course of the evaluation, from cross-correlation of survey results, and from advisors' questionnaire and interview responses, are summarised below.

3.3.1 Aspirations, interests and attitude to conservation

O/o individual aspirations, interests and attitude to conservation are amongst the most significant influences on uptake of advice. Not surprisingly given that the evaluation had been commissioned by SNH, every single interviewee described their attitude to conservation as relatively keen or supportive, although response to other questions might reveal otherwise. Those with a real interest in conservation were, perhaps predictably, those keenest and most committed to managing designated sites sympathetically, including for example amongst the random sample of o/o interviewed, two past FWAG chairmen and a former SNH board member. The evaluation survey results suggest that o/o who have previously received advice, participated in an agri-environment scheme or had a previous SNH management agreement are generally more likely to implement advice. Advice may be unlikely to make much difference to this category of o/o, or to those who already have a positive attitude to conservation or SSSI management, whereas advice might potentially have a much greater positive influence on o/o who are less interested in or motivated towards SSSI management.

3.3.2 Presence of other designated sites on land under management

Survey consultations suggested no evident difference in terms of response to advice or implementation rate of recommendations between those with only one SSSI on their land and those with several.

3.3.3 Perceived limitations imposed by SSSI status

Most o/o felt that designated status restricted the way they managed the site, and saw it as an inhibition restricting what they would really like to do, although most were hard pushed to be specific how. The most common examples offered by o/o were restrictions on drainage, stocking rates or dates, and more commercial management for sport or tourism oriented diversification such as paintball. Many commented that SSSI status had never actually stopped them doing anything, but they were constantly aware of having to ask. Those who considered the limitations imposed by SSSI status were negligible, or implied no more restriction than the way they would manage the land regardless, were distinctly those most willing to consider or implement sympathetic management. None of the o/o interviewed felt that SSSI status had a positive impact on securing funding for practical site management.

3.3.4 *Previous advisory experience or participation in agri-environment schemes*

Those who had previously sought or received advice from FWAG or through deer management groups, or previously participated in agri-environment schemes, were far more likely to be receptive to advice and willing to consider SRDP.

3.3.5 *Previous contact with SNH*

All o/o had some previous contact with SNH. How recent this had been, and whether it had been a positive experience, was often highly influential in their response to advice, but less so than overall attitude to conservation or how easily required management fitted in with their land management system and cost implications.

For some o/o, historical factors which had resulted in lack of trust or breakdown in communication with SNH presented a barrier to implementation of advice, no matter how strongly the case for changing designated site management was presented. For many, SNH are no more than the “designated site police”, hence a negative attitude towards SNH often implied a negative attitude towards SSSIs. Many o/o have a general dislike of government agencies, and in some cases attitude to SNH was coloured by past bad experience with other agencies rather than direct contact with SNH.

3.4 Effect of physical factors on uptake of advice

Physical factors affecting implementation of advisory recommendations were identified during the evaluation by direct questions as part of the o/o survey, cross correlation of responses to other questions regarding farm size, tenure, enterprises, location etc., and from advisors’ questionnaire and interview responses to questions about factors impacting on site management or uptake of advice.

3.4.1 *Type of feature, species or habitat on which designation based*

Survey responses revealed that some species attract more interest from land managers than others, particularly those such as upland grassland which are an integral part of commercial land management for deer or sheep and where sympathetic management coincides with long-term sustainable management from other perspectives.

“A rare lichen which is very difficult to find is less likely to inspire o/o to change management than more popular and easily recognisable species such as salmon, particularly where improved management might have a positive effect on income generation e.g. fishing.”

Bogs and wetland typically attract less interest, often because of resistance to blocking drains, which can have knock-on implications for adjacent land, and/or because there is no commercial gain in managing habitats which do not provide essential grazing. Sites which are no longer actively grazed are a particular problem, particularly in crofted areas where many of the crofters no longer have livestock, sites are sub-divided into numerous complex units, functional fencing has long since disappeared and longstanding local issues may preclude transfer of grazing rights, even on a temporary basis.

Engaging o/o and persuading them to bring woodland with no commercial value into sympathetic management is also recognised by advisors and emerged from o/o responses as being challenging on many sites. Some o/o are not prepared to lock themselves into a 30 year commitment as required by Woodland Grant Schemes.

3.4.2 *Management issue relating to site*

Actions to resolve management issues which will be of both conservation benefit and direct benefit to o/o (particularly in farming terms) and for which capital funding is readily available are the most likely to be implemented. For example, fencing to exclude stock from woodlands or cleughs is popular where it helps ease gathering or stock management on hill ground, but not where woodland is valued for the winter shelter it provides, as typical of many west coast woodlands. Sites requiring reintroduction of grazing typically involve high capital expenditure, and the diversity and extent of work required (e.g. installation of water troughs, fencing, stock handling facilities), particularly on large sites, all requiring numerous competitive quotes, is off-putting for all but the most committed o/o.

Management changes or actions which incur costs but are of little or no perceived benefit to the o/o are unlikely to be pursued. Rhododendron clearance is particularly unpopular because of the high cost with no perceived benefit to farmers or landowners, and because of the cash flow implications of claiming retrospectively. High cost capital work also adds complications as applications over £50k cannot be fast-tracked through SNH's ongoing approval process. Some RPACs fail to appreciate the benefits of such high capital expenditure.

Management recommendations involving skills or equipment with which the o/o are unfamiliar, or which are difficult to source locally, are generally unpopular and difficult to implement.

Action to remedy management issues which are perceived as carrying greatest risk are unlikely to be taken up. For example, several of the o/o refused to sign up to agreements which might require supplementary tree planting if natural regeneration is insufficient to meet minimum target stocking density.

Numerous advisors commented that ease of implementation and practicality of management advice is critical in positively influencing site condition through advisory provision.

3.4.3 *Holding size*

No direct correlation between holding size and commitment to implement advisory recommendations was evident amongst o/o interviewed. Survey responses from both o/o and advisors suggest that other factors such as attitude to conservation, previous involvement in agri-environment schemes or past experience with SNH are far more influential than holding size. Nevertheless, some clear trends can be identified.

Smallholders and non-commercial land owners/managers are generally considered easier to influence than farmers, not least because they are often more amenable to non-commercial management, but crofters and smallholders often lack the livestock, machinery or necessary experience to implement recommendations. O/o of smaller holdings may also lack the necessary capital to support work or manage cash flow given that SRDP can only be claimed retrospectively. Smaller holdings also often lack staff resources, for example to reintroduce muirburn or for more labour-intensive shepherding, although several of the estates interviewed noted that this was an equal problem from their perspective.

3.4.4 *Size of designated site*

Management of small sites is often more difficult to influence, particularly in more intensively farmed areas, because of the disproportionate level of bureaucracy involved in submitting an SRDP application for a small site, insignificant financial benefit, and different emphasis

overall in terms of land management. Small SSSIs may be an annoyance on a larger commercial unit whereas even a small SSSI in terms of area may represent a greater proportion of smaller holdings, or even cover a whole croft, which can significantly influence enthusiasm to seek financial incentive for sympathetic management.

Focus of advice only on designated sites, in many cases isolated from the rest of the holding, or from other designated sites, was seen as a very negative factor in trying to encourage o/o to take a more holistic approach to land and water management, and to persuading o/o to implement recommendations.

3.4.5 Tenure

Advisors, SNH staff and o/o responses suggest that land owners are generally easier to influence than tenants or graziers, although ultimately response depends very much on individual attitude to conservation, motives for land management generally, and the financial implications of implementing advisory recommendations. SRDP limitation to one application per site presents problems for owners who maintain sporting rights and are keen to improve management through deer culling or other wildlife management, but only the IACS-registered grazier would be eligible for SRDP, who may have no interest in changing management or SRDP participation.

Tenure can become an issue where a grazier or tenant does not have a formal tenancy agreement and is therefore ineligible to apply for SRDP. Despite SNH assurances to the contrary, several o/o recounted bitter experiences of how costly and difficult it had proved to set up the necessary tenancy agreement to allow the tenant to apply for SRDP, costs vastly exceeding any financial benefit by up to four-fold.

Absentee landowners are often difficult to track down and can be tricky to engage. Some know very little about the site, and lack any appreciation of its conservation interest, or what is required in terms of management.

3.4.6 Number of land managers involved

In theory involvement of a number of land managers might help positively influence one negative owner or manager, but in practice the complexity of getting numerous owners/managers to agree a holistic approach, and the increased bureaucracy, precludes SRDP application. The notable exception to this is upland sites where land managers are already working collaboratively e.g. through deer management groups, and where all concerned have a joint vested interest in improving management. Extra input and follow-up from advisers is required to ensure continued co-operation where more land managers involved.

3.4.7 Land use and enterprises

The majority of advisors and SNH staff consulted considered type of land use or enterprises of relatively little significance to advisory uptake. Some recognised o/o with higher productivity holdings or good agricultural land as being typically less interested in SSSI management than those managing marginal land as the designated site may just be considered a nuisance. Management of large upland sites may be easier to influence where there is financial imperative e.g. where the potential income from a management agreement or SRDP represents a significant and often critical element of overall income.

3.4.8 *Site location*

Other factors such as o/o attitude to conservation, previous involvement in agri-environment schemes, compatibility of required management with other land management objectives and previous experience of SNH and SSSIs appear to be far more important than geographic location of the designated site, with no evidence of regional variation in terms of uptake of advice. However other issues linked to site location, such as those on the urban fringe, may have a significant bearing on lack of action to improve site condition. A prime example is a site in Central Scotland included in the evaluation survey where the main reason for one o/o not implementing advice or changing management is due to high levels of vandalism and obligation which SRDP would place on him to reinstate fencing each time it was burned or pulled down.

3.4.9 *Conflict with commercial land management*

Conflict with commercial land management is one of the most significant disincentives to bringing sites into more favourable management, particularly fear of losing future income through subsidy, or grazing income, or being locked into a scheme if the basis of subsidy changes (e.g. agreeing to reduced stocking rates then finding headage payments are reintroduced). Blocking drains was also identified as a direct conflict with commercial land management.

3.5 Advisory delivery

Advisors and SNH staff were asked a range of questions to probe their views about the effectiveness of the mechanisms by which the current advisory programme is delivered.

3.5.1 *Involvement of advisors*

The number of designated sites and catchments in relation to which advisers had been commissioned, and their involvement in delivery of the advisory programme, varied. One adviser had only been contracted to provide general advice on two SSSIs in 2009, whereas others had advised on 16 or more SSSIs over the past three years through the advisory programme. The number of land owners and managers varied significantly per site, with several advisers having advised 50 individuals. On average, most advisers had been contracted to advise on approximately 6 designated sites, had offered general advice or produced a general management plan for approximately 20 land owners/managers, and advised an average of 14 on a more detailed basis. Half of the respondent advisers had advised or run workshops on catchments, most of these for two or three independent catchments. Two-thirds of respondent advisers had delivered workshops or group advisory sessions, most only one or two, although one adviser had delivered eight. Several advisers mentioned that they could no longer remember (nor were they necessarily sure they were ever clear) what work had been commissioned independently and which was part of SNH's conservation land management advisory programme. Most advisers had advised numerous other o/o about SSSI management outwith the advisory programme.

There was unanimous agreement amongst both advisers and SNH staff that continuity of advisor is very important to response from o/o. Establishment of trust between a land owner or manager and an advisor takes time and effort, and is very often the foundation to positively changing attitudes and practical management.

“Continuity of advisor suggests continuity of genuine care. Continuity also saves money in that the advisor on repeat visits already has some knowledge of the site and its management history.”

Several advisors commented on o/os suffering “advisor fatigue” after having different SNH staff every year or even more frequently, each time having to start from scratch again explaining their farming system, factors affecting the site etc. Some had become genuinely confused by the staff turnover within SNH, for others it undermined confidence in SNH. Many (not just former FWAG advisers) felt that a local advisor was also important. However, various advisors also commented that probably what mattered most was the personality of the advisor, their ability to establish trust and rapport with o/o, and that SNH ensures that all information relating to designated sites is well documented, including previous advice delivered, response to advice, grant applications etc.

3.5.2 *Information supplied by SNH*

Only half of the advisors who responded to the survey felt they were provided with sufficient information about the SSSI or catchments on which they were commissioned to deliver advice, with very wide variation between SNH offices and staff. Some staff provided all of the necessary information, whereas in others advisors felt that SNH area staff did not appear fully briefed in what advisors were contracted to do.

Eleven (78%) of the 14 advisors who responded to the questionnaire said that the contact details they were supplied with by SNH were either inadequate or out of date, which then put the onus on advisors to track down current o/o, and led to unnecessary embarrassment as well as time wasting, particularly where o/o had died or where there was no record of relationship between different o/o. One advisor commented on the lamentable lack of information reflecting poorly on SNH.

Several advisors commented that they felt the initial list of sites could have been better considered as some were inappropriate and had to be changed or removed from their contract.

3.5.3 *Delivery mechanism for advice and commissioned time*

Feedback from external advisors and SNH staff suggests that the basis on which advisors were contracted differed between advisors as well as over time (the latter reflecting the evolutionary development of the advisory programme). Some (presumably those early in the programme contracted only to deliver general advice) were commissioned only to provide one advisory visit, whereas delivery of more detailed advice and/or production of a specialist plan involved an average of two or three visits per land owner/manager, plus e-mails and phone calls. Most agreed that ideally what is required is:

- An initial visit to meet the o/o and get a general feeling for the site. Depending on the level of information available from SNH in advance, and previous history of contact with the o/o, and/or for straightforward or relatively small sites, the overview site visit might be sufficient, but for larger, more complex sites, a second visit was often required to audit the site and enable production of detailed management proposals. A third visit might be required where specialist input is required.
- A follow-up visit to discuss management proposals with the o/o.
- For more complex sites, particularly those involving numerous o/o or common grazings committees, six visits might be required to produce and agree a practical management regime to maintain or improve site condition.

Advisors' preference was generally that SNH are not included in the initial visit, but some staff would welcome invitation to participate in second or follow-up visits to allow o/o to put a face to SNH, particularly given that it is SNH where the buck stops for designated sites, and good relationships between o/o and SNH are important long-term.

Three of the o/o interviewed who had received advice had not met an advisor face to face or had a site visit. One had received advice by letter only, and the other two by a combination of letters and emails. Several others, most notably factors for large estates, had met and talked with the advisor in their office without going out on site.

Roughly half the advisors who responded to the questionnaire felt commissioned time was sufficient for delivery of the basics, but insufficient to allow them to hand-hold as far as they would like. The remainder felt that commissioned time was insufficient to do justice in trying to positively influence the condition of the site. Several commented that they had recorded and been paid for only half the time it had actually taken to do the job properly. Some sites ended up being far more complex and time consuming than originally estimated, often due to inadequate information from SNH. Sites involving common grazing or numerous different crofters or interested parties were generally the most time consuming on which to try and co-ordinate advice.

Various advisors and SNH staff suggested that a better result in terms of getting land managers to adopt new management would have been obtained if there had been sufficient time allowance for follow-up visits two to three months later.

3.5.4 Presentation of advice

All advisors were clear what o/o needed or required, but there was some confusion as to what SNH expected. In the first year of the advisory programme, it appears to have been left to advisors how they presented information to o/o. Thereafter, a pro-forma management plan was produced by SNH to provide a uniform structure. Numerous advisors commented that this was not particularly farmer or landowner friendly, and they therefore produced a modified version, or an additional report. Others noted that local offices had requested something different, or in addition, to the template produced by SNH nationally. Change of management plan template part-way through the advisory programme, after drafts for some sites had already been produced, was an understandable cause of frustration, which could have been avoided had the template been agreed before commissioning of advisory visits.

3.5.5 Specialist back up from SNH

The majority of advisors did not require specialist back-up, but some SNH staff were very keen and willing to accompany advisors as and when required, usually on a second rather than first visit, either to provide specialist ecological advice or simply to be involved in agreeing appropriate management with the o/o. Not all SNH offices or staff had the skills, knowledge, experience or time to provide this kind of support. In some areas advisors have been told that site visits were no longer the remit of SNH staff and that was what advisors were being paid to do.

3.6 Quality and content of advice

3.6.1 How easy was advice to understand?

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who had received advice rated it as very easy to understand, and the majority of these o/o also felt technical information provided was pitched at the right level. Those who felt advice had not been easy to understand were principally frustrated by the lack of clarity about SRDP eligibility criteria or conditions, and one for whom

advice had changed several times along the way due to dispute between SNH and the advisor as to what was required.

3.6.2 *Identification of benefits*

Virtually all o/o felt that advice had clearly identified benefits of recommended management for conservation – several commented that they felt advice was heavily biased in this direction. Distinctly fewer felt that advice clearly identified potential benefits from their perspective, or reflected personal or business interests and aspirations. Six of those interviewed felt advice made no attempt to identify benefits for the farm. As one commented,

“Neither the advisor nor I could see any benefits to us – there simply weren’t any as far as we could see, unless my sole aim is helping wildlife.”

Others were frustrated that advisors had failed to take account of their circumstances in recommending SRDP, particularly retrospective payment which can have serious cash flow implications.

However some still felt that advisors did their utmost to present a balanced view and identify potential benefits, even where it was all too clear that these were not matched by the costs involved in implementing advice.

“Our advisor made sure that the advice we received reflected our personal and business interests as well as what was best for conservation.”

3.6.3 *Adequacy of information provided*

75% of o/o interviewed were satisfied that advice provided all the information they required, although most noted that this notably did not include completion of SRDP application. The two o/o who were most dissatisfied with adequacy of information had found only after paying to have an SRDP application prepared that they were not eligible or that SRDP conditions were not viable on their holding.

3.6.4 *Overall satisfaction with advice provided*

Overall levels of satisfaction with advice provided were very high, although several o/o commented that they would be better able to comment when they knew if their SRDP application had been accepted. Most of those who were aware of having received a detailed management plan were very satisfied with the detail it provided, particularly for moorland sites, but at least 25% of o/o struggled to comment on how satisfied they were with the management plan produced for them because they had no recollection of ever having seen one.

“The management plan which the advisor drew up is absolutely critical in telling us exactly what stocking levels we needed to have when.”

“The eventual plan which the advisor produced was good, but the initial plan was far too aspirational and too heavily biased towards conservation without taking enough account of how we farm.”

4. EVALUATION OF SUCCESS IN RELATION TO OBJECTIVE 1: TO SUSTAIN THE LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION OF REMEDY MECHANISMS

4.1 Raising awareness of designation status, features, appropriate management, regulations and cross-compliance requirements

O/o interviews included questions to determine the effects of advice received through the advisory programme on awareness and land management practice. Interviewees were not asked to rate their previous level of awareness, but comments highlighted how significantly this influenced responses. Advisors were also asked how effective they felt the advisory programme had been in influencing attitude and awareness.

Table 2 – Summary of o/o responses regarding effects of advice

(n= 26 o/o interviewed who had received advice)

Q: Has the advice you received	Response (no. survey respondents)	
	Yes	No
Increased your awareness of need for sympathetic management?	11	15
Improved your understanding of the kind of management required on the SSSI?	13	
Increased your awareness of funding options to improve management?	18	8
Improved awareness of diffuse pollution or regulatory controls such as cross compliance?		26

4.1.1 Raising awareness of conservation significance and condition of designated site

Asking o/o during interviews about their awareness of the conservation significance of the designated site for which they were responsible proved somewhat counter-productive. The most immediate response for most was to rate their awareness very highly, but further probing revealed that this was partly because of fear that SNH might otherwise force “something” else on them (restrictions, surveys, information). Similarly very few respondents felt their site was in poor condition, but some said they wouldn’t admit this to SNH for fear of being forced to do something they didn’t want to. Very few felt their site was deteriorating, or were aware of factors which might lead to deterioration. Some disputed SNH’s verdict on site condition, maintaining that it was actually in excellent condition.

Contrary to what responses suggested, response to questions and open discussion later during interviews revealed that amongst most of the o/o interviewed, awareness of the conservation significance is surprisingly low. Interestingly, those most committed to sympathetic site management were generally those most aware of conservation significance, and whose aspirations and interests in terms of wider land management also coincided with objectives for designated site management.

Interviews undertaken during the evaluation suggest that there is a widespread lack of understanding amongst o/o about what SSSI status actually means, what o/o can or can’t do in relation to a site, and consequent resentment that SNH is trying to “play God” or exert its authority over the whole site, if not whole farms/crofts. The greatest lack of understanding relates to whether SNH can compel o/o to change site management or take action to

improve site condition. Those who had previously had an SNH management agreement were the most aware of need for appropriate management and what this entailed.

Interviews with o/o revealed that even those who knew in very general terms what had prompted site designation did not fully appreciate why their particular site was so special. Many of the SNH staff and advisors consulted in the survey were surprised to hear this, particularly given that o/o should all have received a citation at the time of initial site designation, and updated notification of the designation status, features and key management issues within the last few years, as well as a more recent 1:1 advisory visit through the programme. Most o/o felt that although previous correspondence from SNH may have spelled out key features of the site, and some were acutely aware of sites being in unfavourable condition, many saw this as a criticism of their management and did not understand the basis on which condition was being assessed or key indicators of change which they might look out for themselves.

Overall, the advisory programme appears to have been successful in raising awareness of the features, species and habitats which have led to site designation amongst those o/o who were not already familiar with these. Many of the o/o interviewed made comments such as

“The advice I received has put to the front of my mind how valuable and sensitive this site is, whereas that was only previously ever at the back of my mind.”

Only one o/o felt that advice had failed to sufficiently explain why the site had been designated or the need for sympathetic management, as demonstrated by their comment:

“I don’t know what’s actually there or why this site is supposedly so special.”

Advisors confirmed that in their view, advisory visits had been most effective in awareness raising where the conservation value of SSSIs was not previously appreciated or valued, but where awareness was already high, the advisory programme had little effect. Some felt that advisory visits raised awareness of the unfavourable status of SSSIs and potential threats, but failed to engender sufficient appreciation or understanding of the features or species which made a site so special. Detailed advisory visits, as commissioned later in the advisory programme, were generally considered far more effective than general visits. Workshops were generally considered less effective than 1:1 visits in awareness raising because the interest of sites varied so much and needed to be explained on an individual site basis. One advisor commented that for a catchment workshop they had been commissioned to deliver, SNH had failed to provide clear guidance on if and why the SSSI status was unfavourable, which limited how effectively they could cover this during the workshop.

4.1.2 *Raising awareness of appropriate management options*

Although only half of the o/o interviewed said that advisory visits had increased their awareness of need for sympathetic site management, nearly all others clarified their response by saying that they felt their level of awareness was already very high, particularly those who had previously been in agri-environment schemes or had SNH management agreements relating to the designated site. Comments which typify responses included:

“The advisor was great in explaining what was important and how to manage it, in our own language. Much better than all the flower boffins.”

“It’s helped refine our thinking but we knew most of it through RSS.”

Half of those interviewed acknowledged that advice had helped improve their understanding of management requirements with comments such as :

“We knew the site wasn’t in tip-top condition but it’s the advisor explaining which bits were in unfavourable condition and why which has really helped us understand what future management is required and what a difference even small changes can make.”

“The advice we received helped us focus on ways of mitigating habitat loss on one particular site. To my mind, it was SNH money well spent, and time well spent on my part.”

Of the remainder, roughly half (i.e. another 25% of all those interviewed who had received advice) felt they already knew what was required in terms of management hence advice had done little to increase their understanding. Typically this included o/o who did not necessarily agree with SNH’s views on recommended management, or those who felt SSSI designation restricted how they might prefer to manage the site.

“We’re well aware of what’s required. Doing it is another matter.”

The remainder, roughly 25% of o/o interviewed, felt that advice had fallen short in communicating what was required to maintain or improve the conservation interest of the site.

“We know not to put fertiliser within 30 m of water, but otherwise we still don’t really know what we should or shouldn’t be doing. We just get on with farming, and hope we are doing no wrong.”

“We never had a visit, just emails and letters, which rambled on about changing the profile of wildlife on the loch. Are we to put up signposts from Greenland telling different geese to come and visit? If I weren’t sympathetic to what is required, I would have switched off entirely.”

4.1.3 Effect of advice on awareness of funding options

Raising awareness of funding options is not stated as a key objective for the advisory programme, but is an essential part of identifying viable management solutions, and hence was included in the o/o questionnaire. The majority (nearly 70%) of o/o interviewed welcomed the fact that advice had increased their awareness of funding options to improve designated site management.

“We feel we know all we want to about land management, but what we didn’t know was how to get money to support sympathetic conservation management, which is what the advisor helped us with.”

The remainder were either not interested in changing management and hence not interested in funding options, or felt they were already fairly clued-up about funding.

“We’d already looked at SRDP on the computer. To be honest, the advisor didn’t seem to know any more than we did so it didn’t really move us on.”

“Advice confirmed we’re not damaging the loch – and just as important to us, we’re not missing out on anything because what we’d earn through SRDP doesn’t justify the rules and regulations we’d have to sign up to.”

4.1.4 Raising awareness of regulations and cross-compliance requirements

None of the o/o interviewed felt that advice had increased their awareness of diffuse pollution or cross compliance regulations, either because they already knew what these were, or more usually because advice had focused very specifically on sympathetic management of a designated non-aquatic site. Conversely, the majority of advisors consulted felt that advisory visits had a significant effect on awareness of diffuse pollution controls, and to a lesser extent cross compliance regulations, not least because these tended to be areas where many o/o were not fully up to date so potential for positive influence is high. Several advisors commented that o/o were probably very wary of admitting to being anything less than 100% au fait with all regulations for fear of someone knocking on their door as a result.

4.2 Identifying viable management solutions

Roughly half of the o/o who had received advice felt that the recommendations advisors had made were very practical and realistic.

“The advisors’ ideas helped enormously in identifying practical management options.”

“The enthusiasm, knowledge and can-do attitude and approach of the advisor was wholly responsible for persuading us to reintroduce grazing to part of the site. We knew this was key to improving site condition, but had never worked out a realistic way of making it pay its way. It may not have tackled the whole site, but it’s a start. If we’d been pushed to sort out the whole site straight away, it wouldn’t have happened, but based on the success of this first area, we’re inspired to do more. It’s all thanks to the advisor – unless SNH had paid them to come out, nothing would have happened.”

Three of those interviewed noted recommendations for their site as being totally impractical or unrealistic, reflecting the practical barriers to implementing management changes necessary to improve the condition of some designated sites. The remainder of o/o interviewed fell somewhere in the middle. Reduction in winter grazing requiring off-wintering of sheep on farms with closed flocks where o/o were concerned about health status was the most common concern, particularly on organic farms who struggled to find suitable alternative registered organic land for away wintering stock. One farmer was keen to implement recommended muirburn but recommendation to reintroduce burning in small patches on a vast hill was totally impractical without additional labour on a large farm with no employees, and on land impossibly steep to cut firebreaks mechanically before burning. Practicality of recommendations was also an issue for crofters who face difficulties with accessing apportioned crofts, who no longer have the necessary stock to reintroduce grazing, or machinery to cut or bale hay. On several sites a combination of deteriorating drainage and climate change meant it was now totally impractical to cut grass.

4.3 Increasing positive dialogue between stakeholders

4.3.1 Effect of advice on joint projects with neighbours or other stakeholders

O/o were asked two questions during interviews to establish the effect of advice on joint projects or management. Only on one site had advice led to a project with neighbours or other stakeholders, in this case common grazings committee, but of the 26 respondents who had received advice, only seven of the SSSIs involved other people such as a landlord or other neighbouring estates. Interestingly at least half of the advisors consulted during the evaluation felt that the advisory programme had a very positive effect on promoting

collaboration between neighbours, although workshops had very little impact in this respect. One noted two particular success stories, one where advice had led to occupiers forming a constituted grazing committee, and another where links had been made between non-grazing owners and potential graziers as a result of advice. Several advisors commented that they had been involved in large upland sites where o/o had agreed to change management only if neighbours also demonstrated similar commitment, particularly where deer management was involved. Most advisors felt that both workshops and advisory visits offered potential to increase dialogue between stakeholders, and to help resolve conflict in a neutral atmosphere. Various other advisors commented that their role had usually been to advise individual o/o, and that rarely was the necessary time allowed to stimulate or co-ordinate joint projects.

4.3.2 *Effect of advice on relationship between SNH and o/o*

The aim of this project was to evaluate SNH's designated sites advisory programme, not to evaluate SNH's reputation amongst o/o, although evaluation survey responses from both o/o and advisors reveal that attitude towards SNH (and other government agencies) has a direct impact on willingness to implement recommendations for sympathetic management of designated sites. Whilst some o/o held SNH in exceptionally high regard, and could not speak highly enough of the support they had received from SNH staff, these were very definitely in the minority amongst o/o interviewed. Many perceived SNH staff as high handed. Rightly or wrongly, many o/o reported feeling that SNH was trying to blindly impose its own world view without any real understanding of the conflicts o/o face between delivering conservation targets while simultaneously achieving their own objectives, not least profitably managing land.

Of the o/o interviewed, 21 (80%) felt advice had not affected their relationship with SNH, which reflects the views of most of the advisors consulted. Comments included

"Advice was about management of designated sites, not relationship counselling."

"I can't remember when we last saw someone from SNH, but that doesn't mean I necessarily want them here. Our advisor understood things from our point of view probably far better than SNH would ever have done."

Of the remaining o/o, three felt that SNH staff accompanying advisors on visits had helped break down perceived barriers, foster mutual understanding of issues from the o/o perspective and what SNH were looking for in terms of site management, and in so doing, favour closer working relationships. Involvement of a neutral third party, in the form of the advisor, had proved particularly effective where dialogue between SNH and o/o had broken down, or struggled in the past.

"We've had quite a bit of contact with SNH in the past, but never managed to agree a way forward. With the advisor's help, we all now understand where the other is coming from and our relationship with SNH is much better as a result."

Several o/o pointed out that very often it was contact with SNH independently of the advisory programme regarding their SSSI which affected their relationship with SNH. Some spoke very positively about the help they had received from SNH staff, who they genuinely felt were doing their utmost to help, and whose expertise and support they greatly appreciated.

Others were less enamoured, including the remaining three o/o who had received advice who concluded that the advisory programme had negatively influenced their relationship with

SNH. Two of these o/o felt that SNH accompanying the advisor on visits had demonstrated or confirmed a complete lack of understanding of farming on the part of SNH.

A key point to emerge from both the o/o and advisor surveys was that many o/o expected and welcomed SNH's interest in designated sites.

"I had a lot of comments from o/o about how they never saw or had contact with anyone from SNH, even when site condition monitoring was carried out. SNH should visit all SSSI o/o annually to review site condition and influences thereon."

"SNH needs to take a more active interest in designated sites, and be seen to be doing so, including really trying to understand the issues from the o/o perspective and restrictions on bringing sites into positive management instead of implying criticism for what is happening at present"

5. EVALUATION OF ADVISORY PROGRAMME IN RELATION TO OBJECTIVE 2: TO SUPPORT THE IMPELMENTATION OF SRDP

The advisory programme has relied heavily on SRDP as the main (usually only available) financial incentive to encourage and support management of designated sites. Until very recently, only in exceptional cases where the work required to bring a designated site into favourable condition is ineligible for SRDP have SNH management agreements been an alternative option.

5.1 Role of advisory programme in raising awareness and understanding of SRDP

Survey responses suggest that the advisory programme has been 100% successful in raising awareness amongst o/o who were not previously aware of the funding opportunities SRDP offers. Advisors commented that although workshops had some benefits in introducing the existence of the scheme, few would pursue application for management of designated sites without a 1:1 visit to talk through the details of the scheme and how it relates to their own individual site and circumstances.

5.2 Role of advisory programme in increasing uptake of SRDP to address unfavourable site condition

Ten of the 14 advisers who responded to the questionnaire survey (approximately 71%) said that none of the SRDP applications relating to the sites on which they advised would have happened otherwise, and another two reckoned at least 80% of applications would not have gone ahead. Typical comments included:

“No SRDP applications would have been prepared for SSSIs had advice not been offered through this programme.”

In contrast, the remaining two advisers reckoned 80% of the SRDP applications might have gone ahead regardless. Responses to the o/o survey confirm that this is largely true where o/o had a prior SNH management agreement, had previously been involved in RSS and/or received independent advice, and/or where the SRDP application extended beyond the SSSI.

The complexity and cost of the application process is one of the most serious barriers to SRDP application, and has seriously impinged on the success of the advisory programme in addressing unfavourable site condition by increasing SRDP uptake. At present, SRDP application can only be made online, which immediately prejudices against those farmers and crofters who do not have computer access. Even those who are computer literate face serious challenges because of the complexity of the application process, which is beyond the scope or capabilities of nearly all individual farmers, crofters or landowners – or indeed many factors and land agents. Several advisers commented that preparing an SRDP application for a SSSI was far more time consuming than for a straightforward agri-environment application because of the complexity and increased bureaucracy of the SRDP application process.

The advisory programme was designed to provide the advice and detailed management plan which would form the basis for an SRDP application, but advisers were specifically not contracted to prepare funding applications (other than in relation to corncrake sites in the Western Isles, which were not included in the evaluation). As one advisor commented,

“In many ways the management section of an SRDP application is the easy bit. It’s the eligibility, quotes, claims etc. at the end of the process that make it so complex, and trip up so many applications.”

O/o keen to pursue SRDP therefore usually faced a choice of either contracting the same advisor as had prepared the management plan to produce their application, or engaging the services of another independent advisor. Some of the advisors interviewed felt uneasy about pushing their services on the back of free advice funded by SNH. Several of the SNH staff interviewed also questioned whether the current advisory programme gave unfair advantage to the advisors commissioned by SNH where they were paid by the same o/o to prepare SRDP applications. The risk for o/o of outlaying money on production of a competitive application with no guarantee of approval is a very real barrier to securing sympathetic management of designated sites. Numerous advisors commented that few if any of the o/o whom they had been commissioned to visit took recommendations any further after the advisor’s free input had ceased. As one advisor commented:

“The costs of making an application for something the o/o does not necessarily want to do (i.e. delivering public rather than private benefit) is a significant barrier to undertaking management.”

“Very few crofters would have paid an advisor to prepare an SRDP application. The costs and risks involved just don’t justify it, unless someone else prepares the application and it costs the o/o nothing.”

The time involved in co-ordinating SRDP application, even through an external advisor, is often all the more pertinent where professional management companies are involved in site management, for example land agents or forestry companies.

“We aren’t after making a commercial gain as such but it is our responsibility to cover the costs of our staff time in any action we recommend to landowners. Our specialities lie elsewhere, not in preparing SRDP applications, so we would have to be guaranteed that not only would the actual application costs be 100% reimbursed, but also that the costs of our time in liaising with SNH, advisors and anyone else is covered too.”

On the basis of o/o interview responses, funding of the costs of SRDP application would have led to advice being implemented for an additional three of the 31 o/o interviewed (i.e. > 10% increase in implementation rate amongst those receiving advice).

“If it had cost nothing to apply, and the costs of implementing management recommendations were fully paid for, we would have gone ahead with SRDP, but the finances simply didn’t stack up for us.”

This would seem to be borne out by experience on the Western Isles where during 2011-13 SNH commissioned advisors to prepare RDC applications as well as offer advice, where one advisor reported 60% of crofters successfully signing up to SRDP, and another advisor 75%. It is understood that few of the applicants would have pursued SRDP without the advisor preparing the SRDP application for free, although some other factors may also have positively influenced the high success rate. For example, the corncrake advisory visits were specifically targeted at sites previously under some kind of management agreement, where crofters had already expressed an interest in continuing sympathetic management. The advisory programme has identified similarly high SRDP uptake rates for sites under previous management agreement (see 5.4 below).

5.3 Role of advisory programme in helping applications to SRDP

Half of the o/o interviewed noted that advice received through the designated sites advisory programme had influenced decision and helped them to apply to SRDP, although in some cases this was limited to flagging up the opportunity. Advice had influenced options pursued for all of those who had taken forward SRDP application, and directly affected SSSI management by supporting application to SRDP. Most had done so as part of a larger scheme embracing other work on their farm, croft or estate. One SNH area officer commented that the advisor had managed to get an o/o for a particularly challenging site interested in SRDP where SNH had previously failed. Another commented

“Hand holding through free 1:1 advisory visits is a huge boost to o/o who are effectively dancing in the dark as the management plan produced is exactly what is required for an SRDP application.”

Amongst the 50% for whom advice had not helped them apply to SRDP, the most common response was that SRDP offered insufficient financial incentive or was too restrictive

“It’s too much work for too little money, not worth tying ourselves up with all that red tape, rules and regulations”

Other reasons cited why advice had not helped SRDP application were:

- ineligible for SRDP (pursued through SNH management agreement instead);
- doesn’t fit in with farming;
- may consider future application but deferred to avoid risk of confusion while exploring options for forestry planting of adjacent land;
- reluctance to place any further restrictions on land when considering sale;
- management recommendations impractical within current farming system and resources.

“The advisor had a job to do and did it well. But even if SRDP paid twice as much we still wouldn’t sign up to it. It’s too restrictive on grazing and slurry regimes.”

Setting aside the inherent problems with SRDP, responses to the o/o survey suggest that there are some serious flaws with the current advisory programme in relation to SRDP. At least three of the 26 interviewed who had received advice (>11%) were greatly (and very understandably) frustrated at the mis-advice or lack of critical information they had received about the most basic of facts in relation to SRDP including eligibility, retrospective claims and consequent cash flow issues, and irrecoverable or non-guaranteed application.

“With the help of the advisor funded by SNH, I’ve been through the process of applying for SRDP, but only found after I’d applied that it isn’t going to work for me. I’ve dried my eyes and life moves on. You have to be philosophical about these things. It would be a very different matter if I’d had to pay for advice which was wrong and I ended up out of pocket as a result.”

5.4 Role of advisory programme in transferring expiring SNH management agreements into SRDP

Owners and managers of sites which had been under previous SNH management agreement were generally very happy to review and where appropriate continue managing designated sites sympathetically, given the right financial incentives, provided there were no

cost penalties from their perspective in terms of preparing SRDP application or subsequent financial support.

Advice delivered through the designated sites advisory programme had successfully transferred into SRDP five of the seven o/o interviewed who were previously managing all or part of a SSSI under SNH management agreement. One of the remaining two had proved ineligible for SRDP and had therefore been signed up for a further SNH management agreement. The other had withdrawn from SRDP after applying because the conditions were considered too onerous.

“The management agreement we had previously with SNH worked well for everyone but the changes required to go into SRDP just don’t tie in with our farming system, or to be honest, what we think works best for the SSSI.”

Advisors noted that for some sites, issues such as tenure which had not been a problem for SNH management agreements may preclude SRDP application.

5.5 Role of advisory programme in improving quality of SRDP applications

Most advisors felt that the visits they had delivered through the advisory programme had a significant impact on improving the quality of SRDP application, and site management, mainly because it allowed more time to be spent developing higher quality plans than most people would have been prepared to pay for. General advisory visits undertaken early in the advisory programme were considered far less influential in this respect.

Most of the o/o who had pursued SRDP applications acknowledged how helpful advice and the detailed recommendations had been in clarifying exactly what was required in terms of site management, and subsequently gaining entry to SRDP. For some sites, most typically upland, the moorland, deer or management plan produced as the main output commissioned through the advisory programme could simply be appended to or cut and pasted into the SRDP application, but this was not true in all cases. Both o/o and advisors were frustrated that SNH’s template management plan did not necessarily tie in with SRDP requirements.

5.6 Limitations on success of SRDP in improving designated site condition

It is notable that not one of the o/o or advisors interviewed during the evaluation had a good word to say about SRDP. When SNH staff were asked for their views, one described it as “a complete dog’s dinner”.

In addition to the comments above regarding the complexity and costs of the application process, more specific comments about the limitations of SRDP as a mechanism for improving designated site condition are:

- eligibility criteria present a significant barrier to people with small areas or non-farming businesses, including large estates and others either ineligible for Single Farm Payment (SFP) or who choose not to claim;
- limited range of options which are overly prescriptive and offer inadequate flexibility to reflect changes necessary changes to improve SSSI condition, which are often unique to individual sites;
- insufficient financial incentive;
- excessive length of time between decision of o/o to do the suggested work and approval of application confirming he can go ahead with it;

“Trying to get dosh out of SRDP is like getting blood out of a stone.”

- cash flow issues because of retrospective claim system, which can be a problem even for relatively small capital items;
- isolation of SSSI, and lack of integration with whole farm/business objectives;

“If more land could be brought into the SRDP application, landowners would be more willing to take on more active site management.”

- lack of incentive or justification for preparing SRDP application when a SSSI is only a small part of a holding. Including SSSI management as part of a whole farm/croft application if this enhanced the whole application e.g. won extra points, would be a huge incentive for participation, particularly if it virtually guaranteed success of SRDP application.

6. REVIEW OF THE DESIGNATED SITES ADVISORY PROGRAMME

6.1 Outputs and outcomes

Marie Pages Gold's (MPG's) Summary of Outputs and Outcomes of Advisory Projects 2009-12 is attached as Annex 5. Analysis identified the following outcomes of the advisory programme:

- **126 SSSIs/Natura sites** were entirely or partially addressed through 1:1 and group advice between 2009-12.
- Approximately **350 management plans** were produced, those early in the programme being broad, and the more recent plans more detailed.
- **Diffuse pollution was addressed on 14 sites/catchments** through delivery of on-farm advisory visits to around 60 land managers and a total of 115 farmers attending 16 workshops (some of whom may have attended more than one event).
- **Approximately 34% of management plans produced** led to submission of an SRDP application or renewal or SNH management agreement and positive management changes.

Annex 6 provides a summary analysis of the outcome of advice provided to o/o interviewed during the evaluation of the designated sites advisory programme. As previously noted, care is required in projecting sample evaluation data on the basis that for most sites only a single o/o was interviewed, who may be responsible for only a small proportion of the site, and/or whose views and action may differ from those of other o/o involved at the same site. Where only a single o/o has been identified in a category, the sample is also insufficient to allow robust expansion or projection of data. Nevertheless, analysis of the responses of the 31 o/o interviewed provides a useful insight into the key outcomes of a random sample of advisory visits undertaken through the advisory programme. Percentages relate to the proportion of o/o interviewed.

Brought into positive management after receiving advice:

(a) 10 (32.2%) transferred to SRDP

2 previously in ESA

5 transferred from previous SNH management agreement or peatland management scheme

3 relating to sites which had not previously been in any scheme, only one of which had previously received advice

(b) 1 renewed SNH management agreement (ineligible for SRDP)

Total 11 (35.5%) resulted in all or part of the relevant sites being brought into positive management, plus an additional further site which may be entered into SRDP in future.

Received advice but management unchanged: 14 (35%) which compares with around 50% of visits identified in MPG's analysis which had not led to reported improvement on sites in terms of assured management and/or condition. However as noted above, figures for the evaluation survey often relate to only a small proportion of a site.

Declined offer of advice or workshop invitation: 5 (16%). Comparative figures from MPG's analysis concluded that at least 8% of all o/o contacted had declined offer of advice. Figures from the evaluation are disproportionately skewed by the three o/o randomly selected from the Loch Leven workshop invitation list who had declined invitation.

Statistics produced by MPG following further detailed analysis of information extracted from project reports, the remedy database, internal business reporting and available management plans are summarised below alongside summary data generated through the evaluation surveys. As noted in MPG’s report, her figures were limited by availability and precision of available data and are therefore estimates only.

	Proportion of o/o advised as estimated through MPG’s analysis of 59% of all management plans produced	Proportion of o/o interviewed during evaluation survey who had received advice (n=26)
% plans aiming to address expiring or expired SNH management agreements	31%	27%
% plans resulting in SRDP applications	26%	32.2%
% plans resulting in remedy outside SRDP (e.g. renewal of SNH management agreement)	9%	4%
% plans produced resulting in remedy	34% (although acknowledged that in practice likely to be less as sample contained large proportion of expiring management agreements)	35.5%
% expiring management agreements addressed transferred into SRDP	61%	71%
% expiring management agreements addressed renewed or no longer needed	20%	14%
% expiring management agreements addressed leading to remedy in or outwith SRDP	81%	85%
% plans resulting in SRDP applications that are expiring management agreement cases	72%	45%

6.2 Role of the advisory programme in delivering SNH targets to bring designated sites into favourable condition

Although some SNH staff consulted felt that the current advisory programme was absolutely critical to meeting targets for bringing designated sites into more favourable condition, others questioned whether contracting external advisors was the most effective delivery mechanism. As one member of SNH staff commented

“If we’re honest, we all have one or two problem sites, or o/os, which we wouldn’t wish on our worst enemies. Even the best advisors can’t work miracles, and we have to be realistic about what can be achieved, and how best we make best use of limited time and resources.”

“For a couple of years we didn’t put forward any sites as the chances of a net benefit were too low to justify the time it would take for us to sort out the documentation and liaise with the advisor. What’s the point in wasting resources paying an advisor to visit o/o where we have already established that the management we would like to see doesn’t fit in with what the o/o wants to do, or fit neatly into SRDP?”

Staff in one area commented that despite the considerable time and effort taken to specifically select designated sites with the highest likelihood of a positive outcome, i.e. excluding those with a “difficult history”, advice delivered through the programme had resulted in very little positive change in terms of physical management. Furthermore, the advisory programme in their area had not resulted in a single successful SRDP application for designated sites.

“In our eyes, the advisory programme has taken a lot of time for very little benefit, although what it has done is brought designated sites in unfavourable condition up the priority list and made us think about what we can do to influence their management.”

6.3 Advisory programme’s role in updating SNH data on designated sites

The project brief excluded evaluation of the success of the advisory programme in delivering its third objective regarding updating of available data on designated sites, although at SNH’s request, questions in this regard were included within SNH staff interviews.

The advisory programme was generally considered to have been successful in updating SNH’s records of o/o contacts, although the difficulties experienced during the evaluation o/o survey suggest that there is still considerable scope for improvement in this respect. Some SNH staff also question whether paying highly experienced advisors to research basic administrative contact details is the most cost effective method of SNH maintaining an up to date contact register for designated sites.

Copies of management plans provided to SNH by advisors provided a record of present management, and suggested remedy mechanisms, but management plans were not necessarily produced for all sites included in the advisory programme. For some, particularly more complex sites involving numerous o/o, commissioned time was only able to go as far as exploratory discussions identifying key issues. SNH staff had agreed in some areas that there was little point in producing a management plan if the recommended action was ineligible for SRDP, or the o/o was definitely not going to pursue SRDP for other reasons (such as the cost of application).

The extent to which issues and barriers to sympathetic management identified during advisory visits has been fed back to SNH varies considerably. Understandably, many advisors were circumspect about including this level of detail in the template management plan. Additional informal feedback by phone or face to face regarding how individual land managers responded to the advisory approach taken, their attitudes and scope for future intervention, was widely welcomed by SNH staff, but did not provide any written record of key factors limiting sympathetic management which would be essential background to any future intervention.

6.4 Factors contributing to the success of the advisory programme

6.4.1 Provision of free advice

Most o/o interviewed were aware of possible sources of advice, such as SAC or land agents, but other than those already interested in SRDP, few would have sought or been prepared to pay for advice regarding SSSI management.

The questionnaire used to interview o/o as part of the evaluation did not specifically ask whether they would be prepared to pay for advice in relation to designated sites, although responses to other questions confirmed most would not. Typical comments included:

“If the government thinks that my site is sufficiently important to designate it as a SSSI, then why should I have to pay for advice to find out what’s required to keep it so special or what I should be doing to manage it?”

6.4.2 Advisory approach

The evaluation confirms that 1:1 visits by experienced advisors who understand all aspects of land management have underpinned the success of the advisory programme in bringing more designated sites into sympathetic management. Practicality and affordability of recommendations has been essential.

“What o/o really want, and need, is 1:1 help and advice specifically tailored to their needs.”

“1:1 advice is the best way to get information and assistance to landowners.”

Many of those consulted commented that the inter-personal skills of the advisors (and any SNH staff involved) are as important, if not more so, as technical knowledge and experience. In particular, ability to establish a rapport with o/o, win their trust and inspire confidence were considered critical to positive action. Ability to think laterally and come up with novel ideas that appealed to o/o that had not previously been suggested was also essential to the success of the advisory programme.

6.4.2 Independence and reputation of advisors

The 'honest broker' identity of an independent non-SNH advisor coming in, with no axe to grind, was fundamental to many o/o accepting offer of advice. The established reputation of local advisors and respect generated from previous advisory work or other contact was also instrumental in o/o receptiveness to advice.

6.4.3 Support from SNH

In some but not all parts of Scotland, support from area or regional SNH staff had positively contributed to the success of the advisory programme from identification of sites and provision of background information to accompanying advisors on request to provide specialist conservation advice.

6.5 Factors detracting from the success of the advisory programme

6.5.1 Cost of implementing advice

Implementation of all management recommendations comes at a cost, in time or lost grazing if not in capital costs. Inevitably those o/o who perceive less benefit for themselves, their business, and/or for conservation, are far less likely to implement recommendations than those convinced of the various benefits to be derived. Most o/o felt that recommendations must be at least cost neutral to them. Some suggested SNH were welcome to come in and do the work if they felt it was so important.

“We already know what SNH want to happen on the site, but from our perspective, it’s going to cost us a lot of time and money to do something which is of no benefit to us. If SNH are so worried about the condition of the site, why don’t they come in and do something about it? We’ve told them we’re quite happy for them to come and control the rhododendron if that’s what they want, at their own cost.”

The South Scotland Bog Scheme is an example of where SNH has already successfully adopted this type of approach. Under this scheme, relevant land managers were offered free 1:1 advisory visits, the main output of which was a management plans drawn up in discussion with the land manager, which then formed the basis of a simple management agreement for the site. Smaller/easier management work such as fencing was organised by the owner/manager, with the costs 100% reimbursed by SNH. Larger or more specialised management work such as ditch blocking and woodland removal was organised by SNH, who paid the contractor direct. A monitoring visit was then arranged involving both SNH local staff and the land manager, following which the land manager took responsibility to carry out annual monitoring and return information to SNH.

6.5.2 SRDP

Inherent problems with SRDP, in particular the high level of bureaucracy involved, have inevitably had major implications on the success of the advisory programme in achieving its objectives. One of the other most significant factors limiting potential for the advisory programme to positively influence site management has been restriction on advisors preparing SRDP applications as part of SNH’s commissioned advisory programme due to perceived risk of conflict or unfair advantage being given to applicants.

“These were o/os who had for whatever reason proved difficult to get to in the past, but despite this, and my success in getting a sympathetic hearing from most of them, there was no provision for any follow-up. Indeed I was told that SNH could not support my preparation of SRDP plans, but there were a variety of advisers who they might choose to pay to do this for them. This is where it all came to a grinding halt.”

Risk of outlaying money on commissioning a competitive application with no guarantee of approval has presented a major factor detracting from the success of the advisory programme. Even where the cost and complexity of application could be overcome, insufficient financial incentives offered, and lack of confidence in securing the necessary approval were the barriers most frequently identified as barriers to implementation of advice. Capital cost of implementing recommendations and cash flow problems because SRDP grant can only be claimed retrospectively are also significant barriers to both uptake of SRDP and implementation of advisory recommendations. Other significant problems posed by SRDP for o/o of designated sites are that SRDP application is limited to IACS holder (often grazier) which precludes separate application by landowner for wildlife management, even where owner retains all rights other than those for domestic stock grazing

6.5.3 *Site specific focus*

The majority of advisors felt that both the current advisory programme and SRDP collectively encourage designated sites to be considered in isolation rather than in the context of broader farm/land management. Perceived lack of joined-up-thinking at landscape level fails to take account of the fact that adjusting management to favour features on one site may adversely affect features on the same or adjacent SSSIs, or on the holding more generally. Displacement of grazing pressure was the most common example identified. Focus on specific SSSIs without viewing these in the context of neighbouring properties, or management required to keep neighbouring SSSIs in favourable condition where these might be within the same heft or home range of the same herd of sheep/deer is a typical example.

6.5.4 *Timescales and commissioned time*

Timescales for delivery of advice and workshops were in some cases very short. Insufficient time was allowed to resolve difficult issues, or to encourage and support collaboration on complex sites.

6.5.5 *Out of area advisors*

Several SNH staff and advisors (including some who had been contracted to work out of their own area) commented that engagement of advisors from out of the local area was not cost effective in that a high proportion of the advisors' commissioned time was being spent travelling. More local independent advisors were not only more cost effective and often more readily accepted by o/o because of their established reputation in the area, but were also considered by advisors and SNH staff to have much better knowledge and understanding of local issues and opportunities.

6.5.6 *SNH involvement in advisory visits*

As noted above, engagement of independent advisors to deliver advice and workshops has many merits, but reduction in direct involvement of SNH staff with designated sites also has some negative implications. In acting through an intermediary, SNH remains one step removed, and therefore the current advisory programme largely misses out on opportunity to break down barriers or improve relationships between SNH and land managers, and for SNH staff to learn more about the practicalities and limitations of integrating conservation objectives with commercial land management. Some feel that this fails to demonstrate to o/o SNH commitment to working together, or SNH's understanding of issues from land managers' perspective.

Most advisors and o/o agreed that resource limitations and conflicting priorities on time which have led to reluctance by some SNH staff to accompany advisors on request to input specialist conservation advice detracts from the effectiveness of the current advisory programme.

Several SNH staff feel that the current advisory programme is not the most cost effective way of delivering advice and would prefer to provide advice and produce detailed management plans in-house, provided they have the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to communicate effectively with farmers on relevant issues. Some areas have already successfully adopted this approach in preference to appointing external advisors through the advisory programme. For example, in Strathclyde and Ayrshire, SNH area staff

prepared 20 specialist plans for expiring management agreements, based on a template drawn up in the area that fitted the RDC application, leading to successful funding approval for ongoing or improved management.

6.5.6 *Perceived antagonism from SNH*

Some o/o and advisors feel that conflict between o/o and SNH, which is felt to undermine o/o inclination to implement advisory recommendations, is perpetuated by terms such as “overgrazing” and “undergrazing” which imply criticism. Furthermore they feel that some SNH staff fail to understand the financial, personal and other imperatives which underlie management decisions.

6.6 Need and demand for advice

Amongst the o/o interviewed as part of the evaluation, only those with expiring agri-environment schemes or management agreements, or the very few interested in exploring potential SRDP application for economic benefit, would have actively sought advice in relation to their designated site. None of those interviewed felt they needed any further advice. Expressed demand for advice in relation to designated sites is therefore very low, but does not necessarily equate to need. Survey responses have clearly shown that advice has been influential on bringing some sites into positive management, and maintaining sympathetic management on others.

6.7 Demand and need for training

None of the o/o interviewed identified any training needs relating to designated sites under their management, and all of the advisors consulted in the evaluation were unanimous in the view that 1:1 advisory visits are far more effective in every respect in influencing management on the ground. One advisor suggested training should be made compulsory for anyone claiming SFP, but all other consultees concluded that training is only likely to attract people where there are benefits to attendees e.g. financial or agronomic benefits of actions which also reduce diffuse pollution. The only training which might be considered worthwhile was bringing together a number of o/o locally all with the same habitat type e.g. wetland to review management options.

By far the majority of advisors felt they had all the skills and experience necessary to deliver the required advice. The only request for further training which might help in advisory delivery for designated sites was in relation to use of GPS.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Whilst recognising there is always scope for improvement, most SNH staff and external advisors felt that the advisory programme yielded many benefits, without any negative impacts. The majority of o/o who had received advice felt that the visit(s) and/or advice they had received had been helpful in one way or another.

“I’ve been involved with managing upland estates for decades, nearly all of which have included designated sites, but it’s the advice I received now and discussions with the advisor in my office which have firmly implanted in my mind that our SSSI is a very vulnerable area and just what we need to do to manage it carefully. Were it not for that, nothing would have changed.”

The extent to which visits had improved o/o understanding of the kind of management required on the SSSI reflected their prior level of awareness as much as their attitude to conservation. While most o/o were positive about the advice received, they were often less satisfied with what was being expected or asked of them in terms of management changes in return for little perceived personal or financial benefit. Advice always identified benefits for conservation, and was usually easy to understand and pitched at the right technical level, but did not always clearly identify benefits from the o/o perspective. In many cases this appears to reflect the lack of any real benefits for the o/o rather than shortcomings of the advisor or advisory approach.

Most of the eight SNH staff consulted concluded that the designated sites advisory programme had encouraged and led to more positive and active management of designated sites and had been a key mechanism to help SNH at local and national level achieve its targets in terms of encouraging more designated sites into favourable condition. Employment of external advisors through one mechanism or another was seen by most (but not all) SNH staff consulted as critical to bridge the gap between o/o and SNH staff. The neutrality of external advisors, their established “street cred” and understanding of day to day practical land management, is widely welcomed by o/o and compliments SNH staff skills. Most SNH staff consulted welcomed the advisory programme in helping overcome o/o resistance to sympathetic management, improving attitudes to conservation generally, and designated sites in particular. Even where sites had not gone into SRDP, or it had not been possible to secure an SNH management agreement (which was generally not an option until the last few months), advisory visits were still considered to be worthwhile in reinforcing conservation aims and raising awareness of opportunities to achieve these aims. Although advisory visits were perceived by SNH staff as having helped overcome problems and open up communication channels in many cases, all very much to the benefit of future condition of designated sites, neither staff nor the o/o interviewed felt that the advisory programme had had a direct impact on SNH’s relationship with o/o.

The advisory programme has generally been effective in encouraging joint projects where appropriate, although on more complex sites seeing these through to fruition can be a lengthy process, and far exceeded the time commissioned through the programme.

Many different factors influence response to advice and implementation of recommendations, which in turn may impact on the condition of designated sites. The most significant of these factors are:

- compatibility of recommendations for sympathetic management with commercial land management;
- practicality of implementing advice and changing management e.g. suitable breed livestock to reintroduce grazing, labour to reinstate muirburn;
- cost and resource implications;
- personal aspirations and interest in conservation;

- tenure e.g. is the person responsible for management IACS registered, do they have the necessary tenancy security to be eligible for SRDP;
- previous contact with SNH and other advisors.

Only if o/o have a keen interest in conservation and/or are personally interested in management which coincides with recommendations to improve site condition are they likely to pay for independent advice to help them improve management. Those with no interest in conservation, who had previously been in conflict with SNH or other government agencies, or who did not share SNH's views on desirable management aims or actions for the designated site in question, were generally the most resistant to workshop invitation, offer of an advisory visit or implementation of recommendations. The cost implications and practical issues involved in bringing many of these sites back into positive management are unlikely to be overcome no matter how persistent the advisory approach. In such cases, management is only likely to change with direct intervention, such as SNH commissioning and 100% funding the required action (e.g. fencing, rhododendron clearance).

The extent to which o/o can be positively influenced depends not only on the factors identified above, but also on the skill of advisors in raising their awareness of the significance of designated sites and need for sympathetic management, and available financial incentives.

From an o/o perspective, there is an inherent contradiction between recognition of sites as being of national scientific importance, and lack of commitment by the Scottish government to fund capital work or management changes necessary to maintain or restore favourable condition on these sites. Whilst many o/o appreciated the advice they had received through the advisory programme, numerous commented that offer of a limited amount of free advice was in truth tokenism, particularly when the subsequent costs of paying someone to produce their SRDP application were totally disproportionate to the benefits to be gained either financially or from their own perspective.

Tension persists between what SNH wants to see on designated sites (in terms of species, habitat and management) and the fact that o/o are responsible for land management. Amongst the o/o interviewed, those with the keenest interest in conservation were typically those where designated sites were already being positively managed either under an agri-environment scheme or SNH management agreement. Most of these individuals welcomed advice on scope for further management improvements, which they have pursued through SRDP, and welcome the financial support, but would have done whatever necessary to maintain the site in favourable condition regardless. Even this minority shared the view of the majority that SNH is guilty of trying to dictate what happens on land outwith their ownership or control, without any recognition or acceptance of the associated costs or responsibility. At least half of the o/o interviewed made comments such as

“SNH needs to put its money where its mouth is.”

“If SNH really wants to save wildlife by designating SSSIs and trying to get them managed as they want, then they need to do a bit more about it and take more responsibility themselves.”

“By designating part of my farm as a SSSI, Scottish government has already highlighted the site for special treatment. That needs to be backed up by resources to make sure whatever has justified its designation is looked after properly, otherwise it's a complete waste of time designating sites.”

“Special responsibility deserves special recognition and special financial treatment.”

“Doesn’t SNH have a moral obligation to compensate those who accept increased responsibility for sites they have recognised as being so important?”

The advisory programme has proved very successful in raising awareness of SRDP amongst those not already familiar with the scheme as the main (often only) funding option to improve management, and positively influencing decision to apply for SRDP, but RDC participation, or success of resultant SRDP applications, is a crude and very inaccurate measure of success. The fact that only 50% of o/o interviewed were helped to apply for SRDP through the advisory programme is not necessarily a reflection on the advisory programme, but on SRDP itself. Account should also be taken of the fact that the selection criteria for the advisory programme targeted sites and o/o with a history of past problems, including those most resistant to change in management or agri-environment participation, as well as sites which had not automatically progressed to SRDP for other reasons. In many areas, the most likely SRDP candidates had already signed up before receiving an advisory visit.

The highest rate of success in terms of advice leading to an SRDP application (or SNH management agreement where the project was ineligible) was where o/o had a prior SNH management agreement or previously been involved in RSS. On many sites with expiring management agreements or agri-environment schemes, lack of advice to help transfer to SRDP would have resulted in cessation of positive management, leading to deterioration in site condition.

The limitation placed by SNH on most advisors of preparing or directly helping with SRDP applications in some cases undermined decision to apply for SRDP or transfer of expiring SNH agreements into SRDP. Most o/o and advisors felt that at the very least, all advice for SSSIs should be free of charge. There was unanimous agreement that the SRDP application process needed to be radically simplified to make it far easier for anyone to apply, and the majority suggested that 100% funding of the cost of SRDP applications for SSSIs would overcome at least some of the barriers to implementation of advice.

Greater support to applicants in co-ordinating necessary quotes would be a step in the right direction, but will not address the problems arising from the complicated bureaucracy involved in the current SRDP. The evaluation has clearly demonstrated that the cash flow issues arising from delay between expenditure and reimbursement are a real barrier to some o/o bringing designated sites into management, and some simpler system is required to overcome this, such as facility for direct payment of capital costs. Above and beyond this, there was unanimous agreement that simpler and more cost effective ways should be sought to fund management of designated sites than SRDP.

“It’s cost us half as much in my time and fees for an SRDP application which went nowhere as we will actually get paid over 5 years through the management agreement we ended up with. Surely there’s a better and more cost effective way of encouraging those who are actually keen to manage SSSIs better?”

For those with direct experience of SNH management agreements, this system was considered by SNH staff, advisors and o/o as far more workable and cost effective, but for the duration of the advisory programme was not an option in advisors’ toolkits, other than where SRDP application had failed or proposed work was ineligible for SRDP.

Many SNH staff and independent advisors acknowledged that SSSIs often have unique problems, requiring bespoke funding solutions. The commonest alternative suggestion put forward was for a dedicated scheme with ring-fenced resources specifically aimed at bringing designated sites into more favourable condition, with the flexibility to negotiate workable solutions with different o/o.

“You can’t have one size fits all. It’s so bloody obvious it’s a joke.”

“Scottish Government has trusted SNH to identify and designate the most important sites. It should trust SNH to manage a more easily accessible pot of money to which people with designated sites can apply.”

Several o/o went further, and maintain that SSSIs should be excluded from SFP.

“Farming a SSSI is like chalk and cheese to farming a green field. How can they expect the same system to work for both? We accept that SSSIs are more restricted in terms of what you can do on or near them, but at present there’s no reward for accepting those additional responsibilities, nor incentive to do anything more positive, other than SRDP, which simply doesn’t work for most SSSIs.”

The idea was not to deny SFP payment to o/o for designated sites which are not currently under sympathetic management, which would be construed as further penalising o/o for site designation. Rather the suggestion was to set up a separate scheme which would effectively recognise, reward and encourage those already sympathetically managing designated sites through financial support, akin to the positive reward previously provided under the base level of ESA schemes.

Interviews with o/o during the evaluation suggest that a more flexible and accessible funding mechanism could have led to the maintenance or changes in management necessary to bring the designated sites included within the advisory programme into favourable condition. But regardless of the financial incentives or imperatives, influencing o/o who are most resistant to management change is likely to remain a real challenge, and can be a long process.

Money is not always the answer: there will always be some who are suspicious of “taking the king’s shilling”. Stimulating interest and enthusiasm about a site is essential to securing sympathetic management long-term, but takes time. Recognising the factors which influence management decisions, focusing on the positive rather than the negative, and tailoring advice to highlight scope for integrating commercial land management with conservation objectives will, given time, usually lead to required management changes.

In considering future options and putting forward recommendations, it is important to bear in mind that advice is only one of many factors affecting the condition of sites, and an advisory programme is only one of many possible delivery mechanisms for positively influencing site condition and management. As one advisor commented,

“The core of the issue is the need to fundamentally change farmer attitudes to encourage and support multi-use land management rather than just pursuing a reactive approach to try and save the most threatened individual designated sites.”

A culture change is required to overcome the current impasse of misunderstanding and mistrust between o/o and SNH, and to encourage a shift towards o/o feeling proud and keen to accept responsibility for designated sites rather than seeing them as a liability or imposing unwanted restrictions. Focus needs to be shifted from constraints to opportunities. Longer-term, broader education and awareness raising campaigns have a critical role to play, particularly in changing attitudes amongst young farmers and those who will be responsible for future long-term management of designated sites.

8. FUTURE OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of those interviewed as part of the evaluation felt that the current advisory programme is working reasonably well, albeit with scope for improvement. Rather than suggesting a radical overhaul, recommendations therefore focus on (a) tweaking and improving the existing approach, and (b) drawing on experience of other advisory approaches and initiatives, without necessarily going as far as introduction of entirely new models for advisory delivery.

8.1 Scope for improvements to management of the advisory programme

Based on the results of the surveys undertaken as part of the evaluation, it would appear that there is scope to improve the administration and management of the advisory programme to ensure that all aspects of the programme are delivered effectively.

8.1.1 Advisory brief

It is recommended that SNH should review the brief for delivery of advice to take account of the findings from this evaluation. The brief should very clearly specify required outputs, including required written and verbal feedback to SNH at national and area level. Clear notes should be prepared and effectively communicated to all relevant SNH staff involved in the advisory process and/or designated sites to explain their role in successful delivery of the advisory programme, including clarification of exactly what is expected of them, and what they can expect from advisors.

8.1.2 Selection of advisors

Other than where SNH staff have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to deliver advice in-house, suitably experienced local external advisors with a well established reputation and good track record of delivering advice should be used for delivery of advice. Feedback should be sought from SNH staff re. experience of individual advisors working on the advisory programme, which should be taken into account in awarding future contracts. Continuity of advisers and ongoing advisory contact in each area was unanimously considered more effective than one-off contacts or projects, and essential to build the trust required to bring about positive management change.

8.1.3 1:1 visits

Evaluation surveys confirm the conclusions drawn from earlier internal SNH reviews of the designated sites advisory programme which recognised that workshops may serve a useful role in awareness raising, for example of the causes and potential solutions to diffuse pollution during the early stages of an advisory programme, but 1:1 advisory visits are usually essential to positively influence management on the ground.

“Most o/o just want to be told how many stock to put on, for how long, or what they should be looking for to tell them when to remove them, what scrub to clear etc.”

8.1.4 Scope of advice

The majority of advisors and SNH staff felt that SRDP had encouraged an artificial separation between designated sites and the rest of a farm, croft or estate, whereas sympathetic management of most designated sites is integrally linked to the surrounding land or remainder of a holding, particularly where grazing is involved, where diffuse pollution

is a concern, or the site represents a large proportion of a holding. Whilst designated sites may provide the focus, there is unanimous support for the recommendation that in future advice should take account of the whole farm, croft, holding or estate.

8.1.5 Advice re. funding options and eligibility

Based on the evaluation survey results, there is a very definite need for clearer advice regarding funding criteria. As noted earlier in the report, at least three of the 26 interviewed who had received advice (>11%) were greatly (and very understandably) frustrated at the mis-advice or lack of critical information they had received about the most basic of facts in relation to SRDP including eligibility, retrospective claims and consequent cash flow issues, and irrecoverable or non-guaranteed application. Checking suitability for SRDP and eligibility should be an essential part of the advisory process, and would avoid o/o wasting time and money on ineligible applications.

The more fundamental problem is that without greater clarity amongst those responsible for administering funding about which types of funding can be used for what, neither SNH nor advisors can approach o/o with any confidence. Consistency in funders' decision making processes, in particular regarding eligibility, is essential to the effectiveness of any advisory programme in increasing uptake of SRDP or any other form of funding. The current SRDP website, as well as the overall application process, needs to be radically simplified, and alternative provision made for applicants without internet access.

In terms of advisory programme delivery, better ways need to be found of summarising and clarifying the most salient facts about funding early in the advisory process. A one-page summary "key facts" guidance note (akin to that used for investment advice) which very clearly spells out critical points such as retrospective grant claims would save advisors' and o/o time in ensuring that eligibility or cash flow issues are flagged up before an SRDP application is initiated.

8.1.6 Follow-up visits and longer term planning

Follow-up visits are fundamental to changing attitudes and management on sites currently in poor condition. Targets and work schedules need to be more realistically budgeted to allow sufficient time to follow through advice, including where appropriate helping applicants with funding applications, and/or finding other appropriate ways of securing positive management. The advisory programme should in future allow for follow-up visits as standard two to three months after the initial visit. Scheduling of the advisory programme also needs to take account of when o/o are likely to be most receptive to advice, as well as funding deadlines.

Both SNH staff and advisors widely recognise that for many sites, particularly those where o/o have proved resistant to past approaches, a single year's advisory intervention is insufficient. Based on experience of the SNH's 1:1 advisory programme, a more realistic approach would be:

- Stage 1 Engage with o/o, raise awareness of SSSI interests and management aims, discuss management options. As discussed in section 3.5.3, realistically this will usually require two to three visits, but up to six for more complex sites and/or those involving numerous o/o or common grazing.
- Stage 2 Revisit and pursue SRDP or management agreement as appropriate.
- Stage 3 Review progress, if necessary reapply, examine other options.

8.2 SNH involvement in advisory delivery

The majority of o/o, SNH staff and all advisors consulted felt that contracting independent advisors is fundamental to the success of the advisory programme. Some o/o have serious reservations about government quangos delivering advice. Even where these reservations are ill-founded and where there has been no history of any conflict between SNH and o/o, prejudice against SNH can undermine response to advice.

“SNH has a one track mind and only sees their point of view. I get to feel a bit bullied whenever I speak with them. An independent advisor overcomes all that and is an effective middleman (or woman) who sees both sides.”

A minority of SNH staff feel that it would be more effective for SNH to deliver advice in-house, provided they have the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to communicate effectively with farmers on relevant issues. Some areas have already successfully adopted this approach in preference to appointing external advisors through the advisory programme.

Irrespective of who delivers the advice, the general consensus is that loss of one to one contact between SNH and o/o is negative for all concerned, and SNH needs to not only be taking a more active interest in designated sites, but to be seen to be doing so. The advisory programme should not be a substitute for contact between o/o and SNH. More regular visits by SNH staff are considered important not only by staff themselves, but by many o/o.

Ideally periodic informal discussion should take place between SNH and o/o for each designated site to review aims and objectives for the site, relevant changes in management, opportunities for improvement and a forward action plan. An external advisor who appreciates both the o/o and conservation perspectives might also be involved if required. Notification of site condition monitoring results provides another opportunity for establishing more productive relationships between SNH.

Several SNH staff suggested that each SNH area should be set a target number of designated site visits and meetings with o/o each year, through which SNH staff would also learn more about farming, woodland and game management. Looking further ahead, improved relationships between SNH and o/o depend on fostering within SNH greater appreciation of o/o perspective, and supporting better understanding amongst SNH staff of agriculture, crofting, woodland, sporting and land management systems. It is understood that SNH are already re-evaluating training needs in this respect.

There is scope to use the advisory programme to break down barriers or improve relationships between SNH and land managers, and for SNH staff to learn more about the practicalities and limitations of integrating conservation objectives with commercial land management by involving SNH staff in subsequent visits/meetings. Advisors' preference was generally that SNH are not included in the initial visit to avoid inhibition of o/o, but some staff would welcome the invitation to participate in second or follow-up visits to allow o/o to put a face to SNH. Consideration should therefore be given to encouraging advisors to include SNH area staff in second or subsequent site visits or meetings with o/o.

8.3 Presentation of advice

8.3.1 Site interest and status

It is understood that SNH are already working towards more accurate feature mapping of designated sites, which will complement delivery of the advisory programme. There is scope for review of how o/o are presented with information from both SNH and advisors about the importance of designated sites, in particular species and features of interest. Highlighting

one or two key indicator species, the reasons why the site is locally or nationally important, and the most significant management actions which will affect site condition has been found through previous advisory evaluations to be far more effective than citations with long species lists. The farm Biodiversity Action Plan approach adopted by FWAG as part of Sainsbury's quality assurance scheme provides a constructive example. As one producer who had received a BAP commented:

"I know exactly what a barn owl looks like, I don't need a photo to remind me, and yet even if I've never looked at my BAP again since the day it arrived, I am now much more conscious of what I am doing and why, and the implications of farm operations for barn owls. I keep thinking of the picture on the plan, and it constantly reminds me what I should and shouldn't be doing far more effectively than all the advice I'd received previously or since."

Evaluation of the FWAG BAP scheme also demonstrated that a simple two-sided laminated sheet including photographs was helpful in getting key messages through beyond the specific individual involved in the 1:1 advisory visit.

Involvement of advisors to help o/o identify and understand how management (particularly grazing) should be fine-tuned to achieve or maintain favourable status should be maintained as an essential part of the advisory programme. Advice should seek to identify and confirm examples of positive management relevant to a site so that o/o have a better understanding of what they are aiming for, and how they know when management is successfully achieving this. Good examples of how this might be achieved include the information sheets produced as part of the South Scotland Bog Scheme which included photographic examples demonstrating good and poor condition.

8.3.2 Identifying priorities and o/o benefits

The evaluation survey clearly demonstrates (as have many previous studies) the importance of identifying and convincing o/o of the benefits to them of implementing advice and managing land and water sympathetically. Previous advisory reviews have also demonstrated that o/o are far more likely to take action if a shortlist of prioritised actions are identified and presented persuasively in checklist form. Face to face discussion is generally far more influential than any written advice, but following up advisory visits with a very brief written summary has long been established as good practice.

Appropriate information, succinctly presented, can help tip the balance in terms of persuading someone to act upon advice. In exactly the same way 1:1 advisory visits have been determined as the most effective mechanism for delivering advice, written confirmation of advice needs to be individually targeted. Flexibility is important to allow tailoring to individual interests, needs and personal circumstances, but consistency in the way in which advice is presented is also important to maintain quality control in SNH's designated sites advisory programme. With these points in mind, and taking account of conclusions from previous research into various different advisory approaches, it is recommended that SNH utilise the model developed, tried and tested by WWF's Wild Rivers Demonstration and Advisory Project (WRDPA). Drawing on experience from Westcountry Rivers Trust's Tamara 2000 Project, the WRDAP model was based on providing land managers with a single page summarising o/o benefits and justifying need for action, and another single page summarising management priorities, appended by a more detailed management plan and further technical information as required.

8.3.3 *Management plans*

The template produced by SNH part-way through the advisory programme for provision of management advice was designed to encourage consistency between advisors and to standardise the conclusions of advisory visits in a format acceptable to o/o and SNH. Although the principle is sound, for many o/o the template is too academic, and too closely resembles a statutory notice. From an SNH perspective, the current template does not necessarily offer insight into barriers to bringing a site into favourable condition. Advisors appreciate the flexibility to modify the template to individual sites, but it would be worth reconsidering how the template could be further improved to suit its intended purposes, and what information may be better recorded separately. From all perspectives, management plans should be produced in a format which can be slotted in or appended to funding applications rather than needing to be re-hashed. Any future changes in presentation or other requirements of advisors should be agreed before contract commencement to avoid waste of time and valuable resources.

8.4 **Improvements to data records**

8.4.1 *Contact data for designated sites*

Although the role of the advisory programme in relation to updating SNH's records was beyond the scope of this contract, it is clear that SNH's ability to positively influence the status and condition of designated sites depends on SNH knowing who currently owns and manages the sites. Out of date contact details do not favour good relationships with o/o, and waste considerable resources in terms of commissioned advisor time. Further commitment by SNH to ensure its records are kept up to date for all designated sites would be a very positive step towards demonstrating the commitment which o/o have suggested would help influence their willingness to improve site management. Reliance on o/o advising SNH of any change in details is clearly not working for the majority of designated sites, and neither MIDAS nor site check, even if used in combination, currently provide sufficient record of the required information.

It is therefore recommended that:

- SNH should seek to confirm as far as possible up to date o/o contact details for any sites to be included within the advisory programme before advertising or issuing contracts. SNH should utilise this opportunity to establish stronger foundations for more positive relationships with o/o.
- Requirement should be included in advisors' contracts to feed back to SNH any further changes or amendments to o/o contact details of which they become aware during the course of their advisory contract.
- SNH should review how it can most effectively record and update appropriate data for designated sites, including contact details and a summary diary of all contact with o/o. As part of this process, SNH should encourage exchange of ideas between areas and individual staff to identify and build upon examples of existing good practice in relation to contact data recording and updating.
- SNH should liaise with SGRPID to ensure access to IACS information, which some areas are already using to good effect to confirm and update designated site contact details.

8.4.2 *Recording information about factors limiting improvement of site condition*

Effective targeting of advice, and forward planning of the advisory programme, relies on a better understanding and information base of the factors influencing management of sites currently in unfavourable condition. There is little point in offering advice to o/o where the

reasons for unfavourable condition are beyond the scope of advice, for example where rhododendron clearance essential to restoring favourable status of woodland is only going to happen if someone other than the o/o undertakes the necessary work and covers 100% of the costs. However to date flaws in the administration of the advisory programme, and SNH's recording systems, have led to relevant information not being recorded or passed on, resulting in unnecessary waste of resources re-approaching o/o who with the best will in the world are unlikely to implement the recommended advice.

As the o/o survey undertaken through the evaluation demonstrates, factors currently limiting implementation of advice or likelihood of sympathetic management of designated sites, are relatively easy to establish, even from brief discussion with o/o. Confidentiality, freedom of information and the Data Protection Act should not prevent analysis and systematic recording of factors limiting management for all designated sites.

It is recommended that:

- SNH should develop a concise but effective system which ensures consistent and suitably sensitive recording of key information relating to designated sites including relevant background issues, attitude to site designation and obstacles to management. The information should complement the management plan template and provide a quick-reference analysis to help guide targeting of future intervention to best effect. It would be particularly valuable in identifying issues and differences on complex sites where many different o/o are involved. Sue White's table for Aith Meadows SSSI is a good example, but will require further development to avoid conflict of confidentiality. Information needs to be recorded in a factual way which is meaningful but does not imply criticism or judgement of o/o.
- To help take forward this approach, feedback of information about limitations on site management should be included within contract conditions for external advisors commissioned to deliver advice.

8.5 Focusing resources and site selection

Views are mixed amongst both SNH staff and advisors as to whether it is better to maintain the current "scattergun" approach with the aim of targeting advice on a wide variety of designated sites in unfavourable condition all around Scotland, with area staff responsible for selecting or proposing target sites, or whether other options might work better. Suggestions include:

- **Reduce the number of sites to be covered by the advisory programme in any one year to fund more follow-up on a prioritised list of sites**, attempting to "sort these out" by doing whatever hand-holding necessary before moving onto further sites, rather than a temporary fix for the duration of SRDP or another agri-environment scheme, at the end of which management will revert back to whatever caused the unfavourable condition initially.
- **Target one or more specific geographic areas each year**, on rotation around Scotland. Most SNH staff consulted suggested that a concentrated effort such as this would reduce the time involved in annual identification of sites for inclusion in the advisory programme.
- **Target one or more specific species or habitats each year**, or two/three years. SNH has already demonstrated scope to tackle focal species (e.g. corncrakes and grey squirrels) through targeted approaches 100% funded through Scottish government.

The main drawback to rigid pursue of a geographic or species based approach is that some areas would inevitably miss out for a fixed period, which risks missing opportunity to positively influence management of sites with, for example, pre-existing management agreements which expire in intervening years. Some kind of 'safety net' would be required for sites which would otherwise miss out through this approach. Alternatively, the advisory programme might continue nationwide as at present, with a more targeted focus on specific species or habitats running in parallel to raise interest and awareness.

8.6 Wider recommendations

8.6.1 Discussing issues on the ground

For some sites, targeting only the landowner will not necessarily be sufficient. For example, on upland peatland sites, advice is often discussed in an office with either the factor or owner. This may be the key to SRDP participation, but what may ultimately make more of a difference on the ground, and pay greater dividends long-term, is for advisors to also get out on site with stalkers and gamekeepers to discuss with them issues affecting site condition and positively engage them in the management process. It is recommended that the advisory programme includes provision for this type of approach in future.

8.6.2 Using targeted programmes to promote advice

It is often easier to enthuse o/o about specific species, habitats or issues, which can then be used as a lead-in to management for other features or habitats, both on the designated site and elsewhere on the holding. Development of a wider education and awareness raising programme linked to advice, including local media coverage, visits to demonstration sites, talks to farmers' groups etc. has also been proven to significantly influence uptake of advice. WWF's Wild Rivers Demonstration and Advice Project and the River Spey project run by FWAG are good examples of this integrated approach. As well as the momentum which a species/habitat/issue based approach can establish, this type of approach can also help focus and develop expertise. Disadvantages include the concentrated demand on specialist advisory resources, and the fact that it may be necessary to buy in advisors unfamiliar with particular areas, although a species/habitat based approach can also be highly effective in targeting capital funding for work, as demonstrated in the South of Scotland Bog Scheme.

A particularly successful example of a species-led approach is Butterfly Conservation Trust's Lepidoptera project undertaken as part of SNH's Species Action Framework. The final project report (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B1158963.pdf>) notes that the success of this project depended on careful selection of flagship species for which appropriate management would also benefit other flora and fauna, and a specialist advisor who worked in close partnership with o/o and their agents, as well as the SRDP case officer. Other parallel examples of water-based projects include the Ythan Nutrient Budgeting project in Aberdeenshire, and projects focusing on reducing diffuse pollution, such as West Country Rivers Trust's Tamar 2000 Project. Both of these projects have very successfully demonstrated the scope to positively influence land and water management amongst o/o who would otherwise be unreceptive to offer of more general conservation or designated site specific advice. Examples of species based initiatives elsewhere in the UK include focus on choughs in south-west England linked to appropriate funding options through agri-environment schemes.

8.6.3 *Complex sites*

Sites which involve numerous o/o and/or various stakeholders are inevitably more complex to bring into positive management. Sheep stock clubs are often run on a business-like basis and may therefore be relatively easy to deal with, but sites which are in theory managed by moribund common grazings committees are typically very difficult to bring into sympathetic management. Resource allocation needs to take this into account, and learn from the lessons of past initiatives such as the crofting animators employed in the Western Isles to stimulate and support ESA participation. Other suggestions include establishment of a land management interest group for each site to facilitate open discussion between statutory organisations such as SEPA and SNH with both o/o and other interested parties such as anglers or other groups accessing the land. This would allow o/o equal say and give agencies chance to hear o/o first hand in a supportive setting.

8.6.4 *Advisory package and funding*

Easy access to appropriate funding has been identified as one of the most critical factors influencing uptake of advice, and therefore the scope of any advisory programme to improve the condition of designated sites. In future a simpler, easy-access funding package should be developed for designated sites.

8.6.5 *Other complimentary approaches*

The evaluation survey suggests that there is little demand for training per se, not least because of the perceived criticism that training reflects some kind of shortcoming in terms of skills, knowledge or experience. Appropriately targeted and well structured demonstrations and open days are, however, popular amongst farmers, crofters and landowners, provided the main subject is of direct relevance to the target audience. Experience suggests that events which focus on practical management – such as muirburn or bog management techniques – are more popular than those with a more academic ecological approach. The risk with such events, as with the workshops which the advisory programme initially used, is that they tend to ‘preach to the converted’. Tried and tested methods of overcoming this problem include involvement of individuals and sites which are already well respected amongst the target audience, particularly innovators, or established NFUS/SLE/crofting office bearers. “Pie and pint” sessions in the local pub have worked well in awareness raising or providing an informal discussion forum in some areas.

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THE REPORT

FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
GPS	Global Positioning System
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control Scheme
MPG	Marie Pages Gold
NFUS	National Farmers Union for Scotland
o/o	Owners and occupiers of designated sites
RP-RDC	Rural Priority – Rural Development Contract
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SFP	Single Farm Payment
SLE	Scottish Land and Estates
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SRDP	Scotland Rural Development Programme
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WRDAP	Wild Rivers Demonstration and Advisory Project
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

ANNEX 1: OWNERS/ OCCUPIERS QUESTIONNAIRE

Date of Interview:	Time:.....	Ref:
SSSI	SNH Region.....	
Respondent's name		
Farm/croft address		
Telephone no.	landline.....	mobile

Q1 General

Can we start with a few general questions to help me understand the context of the SSSI from your perspective?

- 1.1 Would you describe yourself as estate owner f/t farmer p/t farmer crofter
other (please state)
- 1.2 Please can you confirm how much land you own or manage? Acres ha
- 1.3 Tenure : o/o tenant common grazing township/sheep club
Other:
- 1.4 Main enterprises: beef sheep dairy arable forestry tourism
- 1.5 What is your position on the holding?
Owner/occupier Farm manager Partner Grazing tenant
Other

Q2 Land and water management

- 2.1 Are there any other designated sites on land under your management? Yes / no
If so, how many designation
- 2.2 In your view, how would you rank the condition of the SSSI under discussion?
Poor Reasonable Very good
Do you think the condition is changing? Deteriorating Fairly static Improving
Please could you explain very briefly why you say that?
.....
- 2.3 How would you describe your attitude to conservation?
Anti ambivalent tolerant keen interest
Has your attitude changed over time, and if so how?
.....
- 2.4 Are other people involved in managing the SSSI? Yes / no
If so, do you undertake joint management? Yes / no
- 2.5 Does SSSI status affect how you manage the designated site? Yes / no
If so, how?
(prompt: how would you like to manage the SSSI differently?)
- 2.6 Does management of the SSSI affect the way you manage other land? Yes / no

If so, how?

2.7 What are the other key factors influencing your land management decisions?
 SSSI.....
 General

2.8 Have there been any changes in your management of the designated site? Yes / no

What?	Why?	When?

2.9 Or any major changes in general land management? Yes / no

What?	Why?	When?

2.10 Have you applied to or participated in any previous agri-environment schemes?

Scheme(e.g. ESA, RSS, LMC)	To do what?	When

2.11 Do you have a pre-existing management agreement (either SNH or through another scheme e.g. peatland management) in place relating to the SSSI? Yes / no

Q3 Advice

3.1 Have you ever attended a workshop or group advisory session to do with conservation or SSSI management? Yes / no

Question	Yes	No	How?
Did you change SSSI mgt as a result?			
Did you change wider farm mgt as a result?			
Did it influence your attitude to the SSSI?			
Did it increase your awareness of need for sympathetic SSSI management?			
Did it increase your awareness of cross-compliance requirements?			

What did you find most useful at the workshop?

And what was least useful or relevant?.....

If you were invited to a workshop but chose not to attend, please could you explain what put you off?

3.2 Had you previously received conservation or land management advice? Yes / no
 If yes, who provided advice, and what was the advice on?.....

3.3 Have you ever received an advisory visit through SNH's advisory programme?
 Yes no-declined no- not offered (If no, go to Q 4)

3.4 Has the advice you received

Question	Yes	No	How?
Increased your awareness of need for sympathetic management?			
Improved your understanding of the kind of management required on the SSSI?			
Led to a change in physical site management?			<i>If not, why not?</i>
Changed wider farm management?			
Increased your awareness of funding options to improve management?			
Helped you to apply for SRDP?			
Encouraged or led to joint projects with neighbours and/or other stakeholders			
Affected relationship with SNH?			
Improved awareness of diffuse pollution, regulatory controls?			

3.5 Please can you score the advice you received through SNH's conservation land management advisory programme in terms of its adequacy, relevance and balance on a scale of 0-5 (0 being low, 5 being high)

Aspect of advice	Score	Comments
How important was advice in deciding what to do?		
How easy was the advice to understand?		<i>Prompt: was there anything you didn't understand</i>
What did you think of the level of technical information?		
Did the advice clearly identify potential benefits from your perspective?		
Did the advice clearly identify benefits for conservation?		
To what extent did advice reflect your personal or business interests and aspirations?		
How practical or realistic were the recommendations?		<i>Prompt: which aspects were unrealistic?</i>
Did the advice provide all the information you required?		<i>Prompt: what further advice would you have liked on any other features or management aspects?</i>
Overall, how satisfied were you with the management plan which was produced for you?		

3.6 What would have happened if you hadn't received any advice?.....

4. SRDP

4.2 Are you currently in SRDP?

Response	Details – inc. options applied for
Yes – with help from SNH advisory programme	
Yes – independently	<i>Prompt: Previous to visit? Options? Any change since visit?</i>
In process of applying	
Applied – rejected	
No, intend managing outwith a scheme or formal management agreement	<i>Prompt: why?</i>
No – ineligible – but have SNH MA instead	
Insufficiently financially attractive	
No – neighbours won't co-operate	
No – not interested due to other factors	

4.3 Has SRDP influenced SSSI or your wider land management? Yes / no
 If so how?.....

 (Prompt: changes from previous management agreement or agri-environment participation)

4.4 Has SNH's conservation and land management advisory programme:

Question	Yes	No	How/why/comments?
Transferred previous management agreement to SRDP			<i>Prompt: any changes as a result?</i>
Influenced decision to apply for SRDP			<i>Prompt: would application have been made without support, if so by whom?</i>
Affected options pursued under SRDP			
Affected SSSI management by supporting application to SRDP			
Confirmed SRDP not viable for my SSSI			
Identified alternative options to SRDP			
Affected SSSI Management by creating new SNH management agreement			<i>Prompt: why not SRDP?</i>

4.7 Do you have any suggestions how SRDP could be improved? Yes / no
 How?.....

5. Looking ahead

5.1

Question	Yes	No	What?
Do you feel you need any further advice or training?			
Are you aware of any other sources of advice?			

5.2 How would you like advice to be delivered e.g. written, verbal, 1:1 visits?

.....

5.3 Who would you like to deliver further advice or training?

.....

5.4 Do you have any suggestions how the advisory programme could be improved?

.....

Thank you for your time and help.

ANNEX 2: LIST OF SSSIS COVERED BY OWNER-OCCUPIERS SURVEY

Bishop Loch
Caldarvan Loch
Central Sanday
Craigs of Lundie and Ardgarth Loch
Derskelpin Moss
Dornoch Firth
Ferry Hills
Glen Coe
Gribun Shore and Craggs
Inchcruin
Kilconquhar Loch
Kyle of Sutherland Marches
Loch Ba Woodland
Loch Level
Loch of Aboyne
North Fife Heaths
Northwall
Petershill
Shiel Wood pastures
Skinsdale Peatlands
Skolie Burn
Star Moss
Syre Peatlands
Tinto Hills
Uiva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles
Yetholm Loch

ANNEX 3: EXTERNAL ADVISOR QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire survey which follows is being undertaken as part of an evaluation of SNH's conservation and land management advisory programme. The focus is on identifying successes, shortcomings and scope for improvement of the overall programme – it is NOT about assessing individual advisors. We are interested in your comments from a general perspective, rather than specific to individual sites, although if you wish to cite examples then please feel free. All responses will be treated in confidence.

1. Involvement in the programme

Question	No.
1.1 How many SSSIs were you contracted to advise on?	
1.2 How many catchments were you contracted to advise or run workshops on?	
1.3 How many workshops or group advisory sessions did you deliver?	
1.3 How many land managers did you discuss general management with, or produce a general plan for?	
1.5 How many land managers did you advise on a more detailed basis?	

2. Advisory delivery

2.1 Thinking about the advice you delivered, through workshops and/or visits, in general:

Question	Yes	No	Comments
Was the time for which you were contracted sufficient to deliver required advice?			
Were you provided with sufficient information about the SSSI or catchment in advance of first contact?			
Were you provided with sufficient and up to date contact details?			
Did you make initial contact with o/o?			
Did SNH area staff accompany you on site visits?			
Did SNH area staff provide any additional specialist back-up?			
Did you provide guidance on priorities for improving management?			
Did you have sufficient guidance on how advice should be presented?			

2.2 What were the most popular remedy mechanisms amongst o/o for improving SSSI status?

.....

.....

2.3 What aspects of the advisory programme did not work so well?

.....

.....

2.4 On average, how many visits were required per o/o in a single year to deliver more detailed advice or produce a specialist plan?

.....

.....

3. Response to advice

3.3 In your opinion, what were the most significant factors in o/o agreeing to an advisory visit?

.....

.....

3.4 Overall approximately 8% of o/o declined advice. What do you think were the main reasons for this?

.....

.....

3.5 How effective do you feel the advisory programme was in influencing attitudes, awareness and practice (on a scale of 0-5, 0 = low, 5= high)?

Effect of advisory programme	Score 0-5 <i>(n/a if none undertaken)</i>			Comments <i>(please continue below if necessary)</i>
	Workshops	General advisory visits 2009-10	Detailed visits 2010-13	
Improving attitude towards conservation and SSSI management				
Raising awareness of conservation value of SSSI				
Raising awareness of unfavourable status of SSSI and threats				
Raising awareness of required management changes to improve status				
Raising awareness of diffuse pollution issues				
Raising awareness of cross-compliance requirements				
Promoting				

collaboration with neighbours				
Improving relationships between SNH and o/o				
Increasing dialogue between stakeholders				
Changing SSSI management on the ground				
Positively changing land management practice from a wider perspective				

4. Advisory uptake

4.1 What, in your experience, were the three most significant

Influences on uptake of advice	Barriers to implementation of advice
1	1
2	2
3	3

4.2 Based on the SSSIs or catchments you advised on, how do you think the following factors affected uptake of advice, either positively or negatively?

Factor	Impact on uptake of advice (or site mgt)
Feature/species/habitat on which designation based	
Management issue(s) relating to site	
Holding size	
Tenure	
No. land managers involved	
Land use/enterprises	
Site location	
Conflict with commercial land mgt	

4.2 If land managers had not been offered free advice, what do you think would have happened to the SSSIs or catchments you advised on?

Effect on SSSI or catchment	Explanation
Nothing – management would have stayed the same	

Cessation or deterioration in management	
Improved management	

5. SRDP

5.1 Approximately what proportion of the SRDP applications you prepared through the advisory programme would not have happened otherwise? %
 Comments?.....

3.5 How effective do you feel the advisory programme was in terms of SRDP (on a scale of 0-5, 0 = low, 5= high)?

Effect of advisory programme	Score 0-5 (n/a if none undertaken)			Comments (please continue below if necessary)
	Workshops	General advisory visits 2009-10	Detailed visits 2010-13	
Raising awareness of funding options/SRDP				
Supporting transfer of expiring agreements into SRDP				
Increasing uptake of SRDP to address unfavourable SSSI condition				
Improving quality of SRDP applications				

5.2 What do you think are the most important limitations on success of SRDP applications through the advisory programme?

5.3

Effect of advisory programme on SRDP	Yes	No	How/why/comments re. options selected
Do you consider there to be need or demand for additional			

advice to support SRDP applications for SSSIs?			
Do you think your input to the advisory programme increased SRDP applications for SSSIs?			
Did advisory intervention affect success of SRDP applications?			
Were SRDP financial incentives sufficient to encourage uptake?			
Is SRDP an effective mechanism for securing positive management of SSSIs or related catchments?			

5.4 Have SNH management agreements been an acceptable alternative where o/o were agreeable to remedy mechanisms but were ineligible for SRDP?

Yes / no

Comments?.....

.....

6. Looking ahead

6.1 How could future advisory delivery be improved in relation to SSSIs?

.....

6.2 How important do you think continuity of advisor is and why?

.....

6.3 Do you think there is any need or demand for offering training to o/o about certain aspects of SSSI management? Yes / no

If so, what type of training?.....

.....

6.4 Do you have any ideas how to positively influence the o/o who have proved most resistant to offers of advice?

.....

6.5 Do you have any suggestions how to positively influence o/o who have received advice but are resistant to changing SSSI management?

.....

ANNEX 4: SNH TEMPLATE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR PROVISION OF MANAGEMENT ADVICE FOR DESIGNATED SITES IN SCOTLAND

Section 1 – ownership and contact details

1 Name of Designated site:	
Total Area (ha) of designated site:	
Area (ha & %) of site under ownership:	
Business name (farm, estate, croft):	
Name and Address of land manager:	
Telephone number:	
E mail address:	
IACS holding reference number:	
Date of Completion:	
Contractor:	SNH:

Section 2 – site condition

2.1 Description of designated site
Date of site notification: Notified features: Brief site description, location, why is the site important; Site Management statement - Yes or No/ date
2.2 Perceived issues identified in most recent Site Condition Monitoring report
Site condition monitoring report date: Report to make it clear that SCM refers to whole of site so features are recorded as unfavourable may not occur in individual holding or may not be unfavourable within individual holding – specify which applies to this plan list feature (s); reported condition; reason for assessment; location of assessed feature
2.3 Legislative requirements relating to site
List of ORCs; cross compliance & GAEC standards that apply; diffuse pollution (GBRs)

2.4 Dates of consents (*under review so be advised by Area officer*)

2.5 Influences on interests of site

Historic and current land use of site including brief summary of Management Agreements (i.e. for stock reduction; corncrake management etc) or other support mechanisms including Agri- environment schemes. This to include notable changes in site management since designation and any major changes in management of adjacent land where this might be a contributory factor

List MA and Agri environment prescriptions –current/ previous cross ref to section 3.1 (map)

2.6 Influences on features within holding (Land Parcel Identifier (many will still refer to FID))

Identification of factors affecting notified features on specific land holding. Suggestion is that this should be done at LPID/ FID level and cross referenced to Section 3.2 and 4 onwards. Include any impacts from adjacent land management (LPID/FID) – summarise here, include LPID/ FID as reference and identify any point sources on map.

1. Factor 1 (include all LPID on which this occurs within holding)
2. Factor 2 (include all LPID on which this occurs within holding)

Section 3 – Objectives for management plan

3.1 Area covered by plan

The specific area (s) to which this plan refers is outlined on the map (s) attached -annex

Area of SSSI covered by plan: ha

Area under previous Management Agreements /schemes that correspond with planned area: purpose /dates (Map 2)

3.2 Adjacent land

Adjacent land that requires to be managed within ownership (but not on site) and/ or within site but separate ownership – cross reference to any collaborative action that is required

3.2 Management Required – overall site requirements

Summary of key actions and /or more general management changes which are required to improve condition of site including that needed to meet statutory requirements

3.3 Notes/ constraints

Section 4 – Management required on land holding

4.1 Notified Feature 1 (named) (LPID/FID reference) – management actions required to restore to favourable condition within this ownership*(to be replicated for all features)*

Brief description of feature (include photo where this would aid progress)

Management actions required (clear explanation of what activity needs to take place and where (LPID)) These are the key management actions that will maintain/ enhance or restore the feature in question. Distinguish between quick wins (no significant cost required) and those likely to require additional funding.

1.
2.etc

Optimal Timing for each action (seasonal)

Alternative suggestions (where these would not compromise integrity but may require collaboration or to different timescale)

4.2 Guidance

Additional agricultural considerations/ constraints/ best practice guidance (should be attached as annex & referenced if providing published / existing Advice Notes)

4.3 Costs of proposed management

For each Action - estimated cost using standard costs for capital works and description of where cost likely to be incurred where financial estimate is more difficult i.e. reintroduction of grazing where owner/ occupier does not currently hold livestock

1. cost of ..
2. ... etc

4.4 Potential sources of funding (if required)

Corresponding Rural Priority and Land Manager Options (SRDP)
Other sources

4.5 Consents/ Legislative requirements

Activity may need consent from other agencies or be needed to meet statutory requirements. Responsibilities should be clearer explained

5.1 Framework for Action

Indicative timescale for implementation of management plan –

Include as annex a summary work programme which indicates the sort of timescale over which the actions might logically be identified. This is for farmer/ crofter benefit and does not require commitment though an indication likelihood of implementation should be given above

Annex - Summary Work programme

Management action (No and LPID/FID)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3			Notes
Management action 1 (LPID)						

Annex - Map (s) to clearly indicate where management is required/ presence of features/ impacts

photographs to be attached with keys and reference to above

ANNEX 5: REVIEW OF OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES OF ADVISORY PROJECTS 2009-12 UNDERTAKEN BY MARIE PAGESGOLD

1. Summary

Number of sites covered	126
Number of plans produced	354

	In sample (n=209 / 59% of total plans)¹	Minimum %
% of plans aiming to address expiring/expired MA	31% (likely to be less: more information could be found on sites with expiring MA and could therefore be included in the sample)	18%
% plans resulting in SRDP applications	26%	15%
% plans resulting in remedy outside SRDP (positive management in place/MA renewed)	9%	5%
% plans produced resulting in remedy	34% (but likely to be less: sample may contain a larger proportion of expiring MAs)	20%
% Expiring MA addressed transferred into SRDP	61%	
% Expiring MA addressed renewed or not needed (positive management in place)	20%	
% Expiring MA addressed leading to remedy (in or outside SRDP)	81% (but only calculated on 59% of the plans)	
% plans resulting in SRDP applications that are expiring MA cases	72% (likely to be less)	

- At least 8% of all the owners and occupiers contacted declined the offer for advice.
- Around 50% of the visits did not lead to reported improvement on the sites in terms of assured management and/or condition.
- The contracts approach was particularly successful on sites with expiring management agreements. Other criteria to explore further include type of feature(s), size and location of the designated site, pressure on the feature(s) and type of holding.

2. Introduction

This paper presents an overview of the outputs and outcomes resulting from the programme of management advice for designated sites supported by SNH between 2009 and 2012 to tackle unfavourable condition of SSSIs and Natura sites and maintain favourable condition.

¹ Data is missing on 41% of the management plans (e.g. no indication of how many o/o were visited, who received advice, or lack of clarity in the remedy data sheet).

This paper does not report on other advisory projects for the 'wider countryside', i.e. management advice for arable wildlife, demonstration and monitor farms and advisory publications.

The paper compiles information extracted from the project reports as well as feedback provided by land managers visited in 2011-2012 and data from the Remedy Database and internal business reporting.

This first review will be followed on by a wider survey of land managers, advisors and SNH staff. This independent study will aim to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and to provide recommendations for the future delivery of land management advice to achieve and maintain favourable condition of designated sites. It is expected that this study will be undertaken between October and December 2012.

The figures in this report are limited by the availability and precision of data from the contractors' accounts and SNH report spreadsheets. The figures presented are therefore estimates only.

3. Programme of management advice for designated sites

2008-2009: Introduction of the RP-RDC scheme

In 2008-2009, the Scottish Agricultural College ran on behalf of SNH 22 workshops for owners and occupiers of designated sites, introducing the new SRDP, in particular the Rural Priority-Rural Development Contract (RP-RDC) scheme. RP-RDC would become the main funding mechanism for supporting positive management on SSSIs and Natura sites. Despite the move from personalised management agreements to applicant-led competitive funding mechanism, it became rapidly evident that mass extension would not be sufficient to support the transition from Natural Care to the SRDP. A more pro-active and individualised approach to advice would be required in order to encourage quality applications to the RP-RDC scheme and to cater for a wide range of situations as to our understanding of unfavourable condition causes and possible remedies and land managers' awareness of the designation, experience and understanding of funding opportunities and access to other sources of assistance.

2009-2010: One-to-one management advice

In 2009-2010, SNH funded the development of broad management plans and appointed agri-environment consultants to facilitate discussions with owners and occupiers, in order to raise awareness of the sites and their designations and more importantly to identify ways forward and encourage applications to RP-RDC where relevant. While there was merit in the approach, it was felt that one-off advice would be insufficient in initiating progress on most of the sites and that follow-up visits by an adviser or SNH area staff would be necessary to sustain the momentum of the initiative. Another lesson learnt was that the provision of general management plans and mapping of SRDP opportunities (i.e. relevant options/capital payments and associated rates) would not be strong enough an incentive for most eligible owners and occupiers to apply to the scheme. A more explicit support in the form of detailed plans to be used as the basis for SRDP application appeared to be necessary.

2010-2013: Specialist plans and on-going advice

Between 2010 and 2012-13, resources (i.e. staff and external consultants' time) have been focussed on maintaining on-going dialogue, facilitating group discussions between

stakeholders and identifying appropriate management and practical solutions to keep sites in favourable condition or initiate progress. Funding for external advice was provided in priority to sites in unfavourable condition where SRDP was identified as remedy and sites with terminated or expiring management agreements.

2009-2013: Catchment management to tackle diffuse pollution

Advice was coordinated at the catchment-scale when aiming to address diffuse pollution from agricultural sources affecting the condition of freshwater sites. An approach combining awareness raising workshops and on-farm one-to-one advice was adopted on these sites. Activities on Priority Catchments were undertaken in collaboration with SEPA.

4. Objectives of the advisory programme and indicators of success

The programme had three objectives:

- To encourage long-lasting implementation of remedy mechanisms on designated sites in order to maintain or progress towards the favourable condition target
- To support the implementation of the SRDP.
- To update information on the sites, their features, pressures, remedies and management.

Table 1 presents each objective in more details and proposes indicators to assess the success of the initiatives. Some of these indicators are measured in this paper.

5. Programme outputs

A total of **126 SSSIs/Natura sites** were entirely or partially addressed through one-to-one and group advice between 2009 and 2012. This represents the development of around **350 management plans** (broad and detailed) across Scotland.

Of the 126 sites, 7 were not originally included in the consultants' contracts but were part of the same management unit as one or more sites of the contracts. Consequently, these sites were included in the management plans and subsequent SRDP applications and thus indirectly benefitted from the programme.

Diffuse pollution issue was addressed on **14 sites/catchments**. Around 60 land managers received an on-farm visit by an advisor and around 115 farmers attended 16 workshops (some may have attended more than one event and be double-counted).

6. Programme outcomes and indicators of success

Objective 1: Sustain long-term positive management

Land managers' intention²	% plans produced
Will/has applied to SRDP or has positively changed management	15%
Intends to apply to SRDP or positively change management but not committed to a decision	26%
Willing to change management as per advisor's recommendations but significant issues to solve	26%
No progress (resistant or neutral)	28%

² Information unavailable on 7 sites – they were excluded from the calculation

Had applied to SRDP or had adequate management in place before the visit of the advisor	7%
---	----

Table 2: Land managers' intention regarding the future management of the site following the visits of an advisor (% plans produced)

These results exclude the owners and occupiers who have declined the offer for advice (at least 6% of all the land managers contacted).

The figures above represent land managers' intention as reported by the contractors at the end of the projects. Longer term data has been collated from SNH records of management progress. These reports show that around 34% of the management plans produced have led to an application being submitted and positive management changes. However, a number of these cases have been sorted out by offering or renewing management agreements to the owner/occupiers.

Objective 2: Support the implementation of the SRDP

Around **54 applications to RP-RDC** have been awarded or are at the submission or committal stages following the advisory projects. They represent around 26% of the management plans funded.

At least 31% of the plans were aiming to address expiring or expired management agreements. **61% of those plans have been transferred to the SRDP** following the projects.

ANNEX 6: TABLE SUMMARISING OWNERS/OCCUPIERS RESPONSE TO ADVICE

Response to advice	Obstacles to improved management	Influence of advice on change in mgt	What would it take to influence mgt or what influenced decision?	Potential future influence of advice	Comment Brought into +ve management after receiving advice, previously in schemes
Brought into +ve management after receiving advice, previously in scheme					
Previously in ESA	Complex site with high no. owners and crofters, some absentee, others no longer actively crofting, lack of fencing to allow grazing on many sections, drainage problems and climate deterioration now preclude cutting for hay, lack of interest	high in facilitating entry to SRDP but only a very small proportion of site. Also reduced grazing from previous levels under ESA	advisor's assistance at reduced rate in preparing SRDP application	advisor's assistance at reduced rate in preparing SRDP application	Interviewed most positive of the many crofters, response from others would have been v. Different re. accepting offer of advice and subsequent action to implement as majority of site still in unfavourable condition
		maintained sympathetic mgt previously agreed and funded through ESA and RSS/MA	Part of much larger SRDP for whole farm, valuable source of income, fits in pretty much with farm system		under SRDP keeps own sheep off SSSI, as recommended by SNH, but neighbours' sheep then graze instead. Impossible to fence sustainably along

					shoreline to exclude all stock
Transferred from SNH MA or PMS to SRDP or in process of application		high in explaining SRDP and producing grazing plan to help application	fits in entirely with way knows SSSI needs managing		ex FWAG chairman, currently 7 SRDP schemes on farm, very committed to cons as integral part of organic system
	Deer management	high in explaining SRDP and producing grazing plan to help application	fits in with rest of estate, made relatively little difference, followed on from previous peatland mgt plan		Rory Putman's experience and input critical to going ahead. <i>"Cons is as much a part of our business as anything else. We are looking at a fragile environment, we have to work with it. If we don't, we'll destroy it."</i>
	manipulating stocking on common grazing	high <i>"wouldn't have known what to do otherwise"</i>	pays for continuing previous mgt		
	maintaining grazing	high in pushing into SRDP but letter only, no visit	keeping island in good condition		island managed in trust. V bitter about mis-advice from SNH re. high costs which can't be recovered of getting into SRDP
	arable reversion as part of diffuse pollution control for SSSI loch	high not only directly for site but other land	would not have done arable reversion without advisory programme		previous advice from FWAG, several SRDPs on farm,
Transferred to SNH mgt plan	shepherding required to manipulate grazing to optimum levels on unfenced designated site section of holding	moderate - helpful in further defining precise grazing required but would have pursued SRDP or mgt plan regardless with SNH help. Main influence on	genuinely keen to manage site positively and helps financially support continued employment of shepherd		frustrated to find only after paying out for SRDP application to be prepared that ineligible but values good and v close relationship with SNH, and expertise of

		site mgt and acute awareness of value of site raised by entry to RSS			adviser
May consider in future	deer control	high <i>"firmly implanted in mind that it's a vulnerable area and needs carefully mgt"</i>	SRDP application deferred to avoid any risk of confusion re another scheme being put forward for TP elsewhere on estate	relatively high, suspect will go ahead eventually	v knowledgeable experienced factor. Estate not pro-active re. cons but keen to manage sustainably and v conscious of obligations re SSSI
No previous scheme but recommendations taken forward through or recently applied to SRDP					
Previously received advice	raised bog in middle of estate	high, previously unaware of potential funding or importance of mgt	SRDP funding £24k over 5yrs which covered costs of fencing + made it worthwhile participating		Impetus for designation came from o/o for inheritance tax benefits. Previous SNH board member. Previously received advice through FWAG, through which been in CPS, LMCs etc.
No previous advice	sp rich grassland which required fencing to allow reintroduction of grazing	low, down to +ve input from SNH and factor doing SRDP application	split ownership, one keen to tidy up site. Wholly dependent on SRDP incentive		Experience on this site fairly +ve but on another SSSI had real difficulties trying to get SNH to clarify what they want "SNH case officer was clueless, no idea what SRDP was about"
		high and v +ve in explaining what is physically required to improve mgt. Wouldn't have gone in SRDP or changed mgt otherwise			Aware of cons interest but needs to fit in with farm. Paid same adviser to do SRDP application, v +ve about their input.

Received advice but not affected management					
never been in scheme		low- useful in confirming financial options but insufficient to take forward	feel it's a lot of work for little money, and reluctant to restrict future options when considering selling	low without change in SRDP rates or farm subsidy system	
	reduced summer grazing on machair, cost of SRDP application	low - advice provided little more info. than previous internet search	not interested in changing current system, was only interested in scope for additional income for carrying on as now	low without change in SRDP rates or farm subsidy system	<i>"I don't know what's actually there or why it's so special, but as far as I know nobody wants us to do anything different". Ambivalent to cons.</i>
	reduced cattle grazing	low - failed to take account of farming system	doesn't fit in with farming system, would need more housing to pull cattle off	low without change in SRDP rates or farm subsidy system	Feels others who have followed recommendations have resulted in loss of wildlife. <i>"SNH has a one track mind and only see their point of view. I get to feel a bit bullied."</i>
	fencing required to reintroduce sheep grazing	medium - v helpful in clarifying required mgt but then hasn't actually been able to pursue SRDP application because only became aware of retrospective payment through SRDP after application completed	direct payment of capital costs, splitting work into sections affordable by applicant or SNH MA to cover costs	low without change in SRDP payment system	some disagreement about best habitat for wildlife and ideal mgt for site, nevertheless willing to follow advice but crofter simply cannot afford to cash flow £6k fencing for unlimited period particularly when return for crofter is limited to seasonal grazing for 4 ewes
	diffuse pollution.	low	clear and mutually acceptable agreement as to what, if anything, different is required above and beyond what's	low	advice only by email and letter. Already carefully monitors inputs. <i>"Suggestion that we should change the profile of the wildfowl on the</i>

			happening already		<i>loch is an absolute nonsense. Arguably the most important thing about the advice was that the adviser may have convinced SNH that we are managing the site sympathetically, or taught them something else useful."</i>
	fencing to keep cattle off to reduce diffuse pollution	low - raised awareness of funding	needs someone else to do SRDP application, for free, to measure, commission and manage necessary fencing at no cost to farmer	high if SRDP application prepared	
Previously been in scheme	not entirely clear!	low	needs financial guarantee that costs 100% covered	moderate if SRDP application prepared	RSPB MA for deer control
	dry heath within woodland requires scrub mgt to keep open	low - didn't tell manager anything he didn't already know	needs someone else to do SRDP application, for free, and to pay staff time to manage + 100% costs of actual work	moderate if SRDP application prepared and rates increased	previously under Natural Care which pd £2k pa sufficient to maintain status
	reintroduction of grazing depends on fencing .	moderate - helpful in producing grazing plans	low on priority list for estate due to shortage of labour to prepare SRDP or costs of commissioning external help to do so	high if SRDP application prepared	already in SRDP for other parts of estate
SRDP conditions too onerous to take forward					
Previously under SNH MA		effect of advice high in explaining SRDP and producing grazing plan to help SRDP application but	limited options to manage differently, arguably best use is managing for nature cons. But needs to	High if previous SNH MA could be renewed	v dynamic organic hill farmer, long relationship and good rapport with SNH, although frustrated by problems with

		subsequently withdrew so effects of advice ltd.	contribute to farm income. SRDP effectively maintaining funding		SRDP application. At time of interview thought to be going ahead, but subsequent discussion with SNH suggests o/o withdrawn as not prepared to accept conditions of final contract
Not under any previous agreement	fencing to restrict grazing	low - failure to establish exactly what is required or mutually acceptable vision or action	removal of condition to gap up regeneration to achieve desired stocking density	low without change in conditions	interviewed tenant grazier, who is sympathetic but sees no real need for action and has no control over w/l, and owner, who claims to be tolerant to cons but only if financially to his advantage
	grazing dependent on fencing. site owned by local authority, on urban fringe subject to heavy vandalism. Tenant grazier sympathetic to interest of site and what is required but not willing to accept obligation to constantly replace fencing	sound advice but no impact	100% funding of fencing without condition to replace if damaged by vandals	very low without change in fencing arrangements	History of annual visits trying to persuade him to change mgt and change his mind, which he has no objection to, and fully appreciates site significance and what is required but urban fringe location makes wholly impractical
	reintroduction of patchwork muirburn v difficult due to terrain unsuitable for mowing hence would require additional labour. Increased shepherding would require more labour. offwintering sheep unacceptable due to biosecure flock and	low - advice considered impractical in relation to farming system and resources	would need labour 100% funded for muirburn and irresistible financial incentives for offwintering ewes	very low without radical change in SRDP or farm support	ambivalent to cons. Feels SNH and SSSI advice failed to take full account of practicalities of hill farming and particular difficulties in wet summers

	movement of heavily in lamb ewes				
Declined advice or workshop invitation					
Previously received advice and/or know what SNH wants but not interested in taking forward	Rhododendron control in woodland		SNH or another would need to undertake work at no cost to o/o	V low	woodland of no use or financial interest to farm so no motivation to manage, no interest in cons
No recollection of being offered advice	previously crofted, no longer practical to crop, grazing rented out		Describes herself as anti-cons and thinks too much emphasis on wildlife but <i>"If someone came to tell me what to do I would listen but I'm not promising to act"</i>		
Doesn't feel relevant to them	diffuse pollution control		already aware through involvement in forestry of issues but feels farmers and o/o being persecuted when problems lie elsewhere		
	diffuse pollution control		already in NVZ so already had lots of advisers out and controlled re. N application hence doesn't believe would learn any more at further workshop		
	diffuse pollution control		Don't use fertiliser so didn't see it as relevant to him, doesn't consider need for advice or training. <i>"I see cons as part of farming but It all looks fine to me and no-one has suggested anything different"</i> .		

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