

# BEN SHIELDAIG ESTATE

## Interpretation Plan

March 2020



## Introduction

The Woodland Trust purchased Ben Shieldaig Estate (BSE) in March 2018 with the ambition to link habitats for wildlife and create a more resilient landscape through a combination of native planting, natural regeneration and effective deer management.

The Woodland Trust's vision statement for Ben Shieldaig is:

*Ben Shieldaig is a thriving native woodland, a mosaic of healthy habitats providing homes for wildlife and space for people. Partnership working and innovative approaches to woodland management are enabling us to benefit communities, conserve Scotland's rainforest and support landscape-scale regeneration across the west of Scotland. Our leadership inspires others to get involved and support our work.*

The Woodland Trust commissioned Rachel Hunter, Heritage Consultant, to produce this interpretation plan. Faced with a blank canvas the Trust has an opportunity to integrate interpretation gradually, reflecting work in progress and responding to the needs and interest of a variety of audiences.

Before the Woodland Trust took ownership of the Ben Shieldaig estate it was managed privately and until now there has been no formal interpretation of the site. However, members of the community of Shieldaig have informally interpreted it through the creation of websites and publications<sup>1</sup>. As part of its wider management plans for the estate, the Trust aims to add interpretation to the site, both on the ground and online. The intention of this plan is to develop a menu of interpretative possibilities that can be employed and adapted over time.

### How this plan has been produced

This interpretation plan has been written by heritage consultant Rachel Hunter, informed by background information supplied by the Woodland Trust, a site visit with Malcolm Turner and Donnie Chisholm and the output of a community workshop held in Shieldaig on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Background information included a copy of the 'vision' for Ben Shieldaig, the WT Visitor Experience DNA Guide and the results of a 'sense of place' exercise carried out by the WT Scotland team. The workshop was organised by Malcolm Turner, Ben Shieldaig Project Development Manager and was held in the village hall. The workshop was made up of WT staff and Shieldaig residents.

In attendance:

- Richard Munday – Kinloch Woodlands SCIO / Kinloch guest house
- Janene Waudby– Shieldaig Community Association; local artist with pottery; runs sailing business
- Helen Collins – Kinloch Woodlands SCIO Trustee (Richard Munday's daughter); returned to village having lived away; young son
- Tom Tindale – runs Shieldaig Outdoor Adventures

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.shieldaig.info/index.asp>, <http://www.stevecarter.com/ansh/ansh2.htm>, Torridon, the Nature of the Place, Chris Lowe (Wester Ross Net)

- Anne Barton – local, WT member, keen gardener and grower, runs B&B
- Lynn Frost – owns Nanny’s Tearoom
- Andy Moyes – retired from Sea Trout project, lives locally
- Owen Kilbride – marine biologist working on Sea Trout project, keen archaeologist (popped in during lunch break only)
- Malcolm Turner – Ben Shildaig Project Development Manager, WTS
- Donnie Chisolm – Ben Shildaig Site Manager
- Eilidh Mair – Engagement & Communications Officer Scotland
- Jill Donnachie – Communications & Development Manager Scotland
- Rachel Hunter – workshop facilitator

## 2. Visitors

### 2.1 Shildaig visitor profile

#### **Who comes to Shildaig and why? Has this changed?**

The local view, as represented by participants of the workshop<sup>2</sup>, is that before the arrival of the North Coast 500 (NC500) phenomenon in 2015, visitors to Shildaig were likely to stay for a week at a time and were often repeat visitors who had fallen in love with the area and returned annually for many years. NC500 appears to be changing the nature of visits to Shildaig, with many visitors stopping for only one night, making very little contact with the village and the surrounding environment. However, there is now a perception that some of these quick-stop visitors are surprised and delighted with what they see and make return visits, staying longer, 2-3 days at a time, to explore more deeply.

There is a spectrum of visitors coming to Shildaig, with some looking for low-level outdoor adventure, some for facilitated experiences and some embarking on self-led adventures with pre-existing plans. The community of Shildaig is interested in the potential to encourage new visitors to treasure and respect the environment. Promoting the use of Ben Shildaig as a facility for health and well-being, as well as being of benefit to visitors, is seen as a way of relieving pressure on other parts of the village, such as the Peninsula Walk. Improving access through the introduction of paths is seen as very important, as is making links to other projects and activities in the area.

Participants were however quick to point out that there is a local audience with a keen appetite to engage with interpretation and activities, who are interested in collaboration and, naturally, the potential economic benefit for Shildaig.

The workshop echoed and confirmed findings from an earlier community survey carried out by Malcolm Turner, Woodland Trust Project Development Manager, between November 2019 and February 2020. 57 residents took part. In summary this survey found that:

- Most respondents visit Ben Shildaig to enjoy the scenery/landscape, to walk/run/exercise or for tranquillity/peace & quiet.
- The majority of respondents (68%) believe the mountain should be made more accessible, 26% are unsure and 5% are against it.
- Respondents think that it could be good to improve accessibility, as at the moment Ben Shildaig is difficult to access and paths could be opened up to tourists.
- A large proportion mentioned that (slow) tourism and recreation in the area will be positive for the local community especially from an economic perspective
- Respondents feel that improvements to access / infrastructure should be “light touch” without compromising Ben Shildaig’s beauty.
- Most respondents would welcome maps/trails (63%) and information panels/displays (49%)

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<sup>2</sup> Notes from 04.02.20 workshop are available at Appendix 1

- Respondents are hoping for employment opportunities and education / information (workshops, training)
- Respondents would like to see greater deer control and woodland creation on the estate.

These local aims and interests are wholly harmonious with those of the Woodland Trust.

## 2.2. Audiences

- **Current audience:** there is no definitive information regarding numbers of existing visitors to the Ben Shieldaig Estate (as opposed to the village of Shieldaig). Local feedback is that numbers are negligible, only a few adventurous hill walkers and locals make it onto the mountain or to Loch Damh. Presumably this is because there is no access infrastructure, signage or promotion in place to encourage visits, and neighbouring properties, who do provide these options, are only a short drive away. (Local outdoor attractions Beinn Eighe, Corrieshalloch Gorge and Torridon Countryside Centre show large % increases in visitors in the past 3 years.)
- **Potential:** The NC500 and the Wester Ross Coastal Trail bring tourists directly past the doorstep of Ben Shieldaig. Feedback suggests NC500 visitors could be encouraged to slow down, stop and potentially even stay locally (thereby supporting the local economy) if the Trust provides accessible experiences for them on the Estate. NC500 visitors are transient; approximately 40% are international and previously they have been accused of being insensitive to local culture and tradition, stopping only to eat, take photos and move on, often causing traffic chaos on single track roads. This audience represents a significant opportunity for the Woodland Trust and the community. Car parks with views, waymarked walks and immersive interpretation that integrate landscape and culture are likely to appeal to this audience. Converting them to give time, voice and/or money to the Woodland Trust is however likely to be challenging.

Shieldaig and the surrounding area is home to 11 B&Bs, 36 holiday lets, 4 hotels, 1 SYHA hostel and 1 campsite with space for approximately 20 pitches. Local audiences (households in IV54) belong to the mosaic consumer classification D ('Rural Reality') and all are sub-categorised as D17 ('Far-Flung Outposts'), i.e. interdependent households living in the most remote communities with long travel times to larger towns. 10% speak Gaelic, 20% are aged over 65 years, and a lack of affordable housing is a big issue locally. Shieldaig is somewhat bucking the trend of other remote communities on the west coast of Scotland – it has a rising school role, young families are staying or returning to the community and it benefits from decent digital connectivity. Some members of the local community will never have visited the Estate, yet they are key to ensuring potential visitors have the information and knowledge required to enable them to access the Estate and behave responsibly.

- **Target:** From the Trust's own perspective there are some clear target audiences that are suited to what the Estate can offer - young independents, mature independents and young families. The Trust's remaining audience segments, mature couples and retirees, can potentially be reached through web and social media content.

As this is a brand-new property, and the Trust is starting out with a clean slate, it can, over time, and through the use of monitoring and evaluation, review and refine these target audiences.

### 2.3 Woodland Trust aims

The Woodland Trust as an organisation aims to grow its:

- REACH i.e. brand awareness and visitor numbers (to a level that is appropriate for an individual site)
- RESONANCE i.e. an individual's connection with woods and trees
- RELATIONSHIP i.e. with supporters, members and volunteers

From a visitor experience perspective, it does this by focussing on:

- Gentle, informal recreation
- Protecting the wild nature of its sites – using natural materials, low impact and unobtrusive infrastructure, seasonal installation and interpretation with no long-term impact

#### **The Trust's visitor offer is based on four key propositions:**

**Refreshment** – experiences that promote physical and mental refreshment – at Ben Shieldaig this can be walks and outdoor activities

**Connection** – experiences that enhance connection with trees, nature and with others – highlighting the wildlife and human stories of Ben Shieldaig can act as spark for engaging interest in the broader story of reforestation

**Wonder** – experiences that reveal the wonder of wood and trees – for instance through immersion in the forest, drawing attention to the tiniest details and the bigger picture

**Action** – experiences that showcase our work, promote our cause, and provide opportunities to stand up for woods and trees – interpretation can illustrate work in progress and offer visualisations of the future, inspiring interest in volunteering

### 2.4 Objectives for the community of Shieldaig

Interpretation of the Estate by the Woodland Trust has the potential to deliver the following objectives for the community:

**Social** – experiences that bring members of the community together through shared participation in the Trust's activities programme and through volunteering

**Economic** – creating a high-quality visitor experience that will encourage increased use of local accommodation, food, retail and activities providers

**Educational** – activities that will enhance the range of opportunities for schools and lifelong learners

**Environmental** – encouraging appropriate behaviour and respect for the land as well as an understanding of how it is being managed for conservation

### 3. What will be interpreted?

#### 3.1 What are Ben Shieldaig's physical and cultural assets?

The workshop participants identified these as highlights:

- Wildlife - red squirrels, pine marten, deer, raptors
- A vibrant local community (village at foot of the hills, it is contained, neat and connected to the mountain)
- Strikingly visible evidence of geology / glaciation
- Panoramic views
- Crofting culture / lifestyle / land use
- It is remote yet accessible
- Land and community have a close relationship with the sea
- Seasonal change e.g. fungi, and changing light and colour – vivid green in summer, west coast sunsets, very photogenic
- Hidden lochans
- It's a Marilyn / hill with a mountain feel
- Caledonian pinewoods / Atlantic rainforest – the mosaic of habitats is unusual in this landscape (most of which is pretty barren)
- Weather –mist rolling in from the sea makes it look like Borneo!
- Deer - especially the rut in Autumn when you can hear the stags roaring on the hill
- Bryophytes / flora – orchids, sundew, bog asphodel
- Birds – mostly by the sea and at lower altitudes
- Existing pinewood is a great seed source (Kinloch Woodlands is already planting using this seed)
- Shieldaig's place in the wider landscape and our ambitious plans for native woodland expansion via planting and natural regeneration
- The potential Shieldaig has to contribute to the UK's climate challenge: save Scotland's rainforest and demonstrate positive land use change across the west coast

The list above is drawn from the interpretation workshop. An earlier 'Spirit of Place' exercise with the Woodland Trust Scotland team arrived at similar conclusions, resulting in the following statement:

*Ben Shieldaig is more than just a mountain. A mosaic of highland habitats, nestled on the shores of Wester Ross, it tells the story of Scotland's forests; the mighty Caledonian pines born of a retreating ice age and left free to stretch across the land, mingling with an Atlantic rainforest on one of Europe's wildest frontiers. Having weathered the ages, Ben Shieldaig holds one of a few scattered remnants of pinewood left to tell this story, and now offers a treasure trove of biodiversity and richness, stretching from the swirling seas below to the lichen-clad crags of the summit.*

*At its feet lies the village of Shieldaig, a vibrant community steeped in the landscape and with a rich maritime history. Named by the Vikings and meaning 'Bay of Herring', the village provides a living connection with the past, with the woodland on its doorstep supporting a heritage of shipbuilding and fishing. Some remember a fire which swept through the glen in*

*the early 1970s, destroying large sections of the pinewood but also creating the conditions for some of the rich regeneration which now exists, highlighting the cyclical nature of death and rebirth.*

*This is a prehistoric landscape, where glacier-strewn boulders cover the hillside, burns and waterfalls cascade down its slopes, and tiered terraces teeming with trees, shrouded in sea-borne mists, tumble down to the sea. A world enveloped in a myriad of verdant shades, from the spindly, needled limbs of granny pines, contorted by ocean winds, to the richness of lichens and mosses glowing underneath, refracting in the brilliance of water-infused light. Golden and sea eagles soar overhead, pine martens and squirrels scurry in the branches and forest floor, with the silence and stillness broken only by the distant whisper of waves, the creak and sway of branches in the breeze, or the roar of stags on distant hills.*

*This is a place for reflection, for stillness, shadow and soft light, for roaring winds and rollicking rivers, for glimpses of geological timescales, for discovery of a land lost, and exploration of its wonders. Taking on Ben Shieldaig provides the Woodland Trust with the key to unlocking the potential of the landscape once again, expanding on its native woodlands, enriching its diverse habitats and telling the next chapter in its story. This is now a landscape with a future as well as a past.*

The story of Ben Shieldaig's past and future can be told in a variety of ways. The next section will look in more detail at how this can be done.



## 4. Interpretation

### 4.1 Look and feel

Some concern was raised at the workshop that any new interpretation should not be intrusive upon the much-cherished landscape. The Woodland Trust's Visitor Experience DNA Guide is clear that the Trust is committed to protecting the wild nature of its sites. There will be environmentally sensitive use of materials and low-impact infrastructure, and natural, unobtrusive techniques and materials will be used for interpretation. Visitors will be aware of a consistent visual identity across all WT sites but will also experience the individuality of specific sites. All forms of interpretation will ultimately link back to the Trust's focus on woods and trees.

### 4.2 Interpretive objectives

Effective interpretation can change people's understanding, attitudes and behaviours. The workshop explored this potential for Ben Shieldaig, with the following results:

People will **know**:

- Ben Shieldaig Estate is a special place and understand what makes it special, why it looks as it does and what is in it.
- that Ben Shieldaig is part of a much wider landscape and understand the concept of connectivity or habitat connectedness
- that the Woodland Trust owns and manages this land
- the Woodland Trust's vision for the future of the mountain and the wider landscape: woodland expansion / habitat connectivity / a more resilient landscape
- a forest is not a Sitka plantation
- how WT plans plan to expand the woodland (seeds to trees, the wood wide web and the importance of soil, research and demonstration)
- Shieldaig is part of Scotland's very own rainforest (and the associated threats, weather, characteristic species etc.)
- partnership working with landowners and the community is key to long term change
- change will take a long time

People will **feel**:

- a sense of wonder, awareness and appreciation of woodland
- immersed in the landscape
- part of a connected landscape / something bigger
- Wow – this is different!
- inspired to get involved (at Ben Shieldaig Estate or in their local wood)
- the Woodland Trust is a great organisation

Things that people will **do**:

- leave no trace
- stay longer in Shildaig village, spend money and slow down
- attend an event at Ben Shildaig Estate or other Woodland Trust sites
- participate in a self-led trail on site e.g. nature detective discovery trail
- volunteer with the WT (or contribute to a citizen science activity e.g. Nature's Calendar or recording wildlife at the site e.g. red squirrels)
- give – to the Ben Shildaig Estate fundraising appeal
- become a member of the Woodland Trust and help us look after this special place
- come back – visit again
- get involved in planting trees in their own community – apply for a free tree pack for school or community
- campaign locally
- share photos and feedback, e.g. via #BenShildaig

#### 4.3 Theme, subthemes and storylines

The development and management of Ben Shildaig Estate will be a 'slow' project. The tangible results will not be visible for quite some time to come but, as the tremendous response to raise the funds to purchase the Estate has shown, the Trust's aim to revive the woodland habitats of the Ben has captured the public imagination. Interpretation of the Estate should continue to inspire in people an imaginative response to the Trust's long-term vision for its future, by focusing on the passage of time, seasons and the emerging output of 'work in progress'.

<b>Overarching theme: Ben Shildaig Estate: a changing landscape</b>	
The landscape is in a permanent state of change, due in part to human activity and in part to ecological and climatic change. The Woodland Trust is responding to this positively and is proactively and responsibly embarking on the next period of change.	
<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Storylines</b>
<b>Land use:</b> volcanic outpourings, massive climate changes, movement of the earth's crust, erosion, forestation, and finally the influence of mankind have all played their part in the scene that we view today.	<b>The landscape:</b> the landscape we see has been formed by the geology that lies beneath.
	<b>Dislocation of people:</b> Ben Shildaig contains evidence of people in the landscape, from pre-history to the present. It also illustrates the story of what can happen when people and land become disconnected.
	<b>Exploitation of the land:</b> What we see today is the result of previous mismanagement. Exploitation of the land has resulted in poor soil quality; thin acidic soil adds to the challenge of planting trees
	<b>Social and economic benefit:</b> Shildaig village has an unusual history, having been built in 1810 to 'raise' and

	<p>train sailors to fight Napoleon. Today the village is a popular, thriving and treasured place.</p> <p><b>Climate change:</b> the WT management of the Ben Shieldaig Estate will contribute positively to combatting the climate crisis.</p>
<b>Wildlife:</b> rare and iconic species of wildlife live in and around Ben Shieldaig.	<p><b>Sea to summit:</b> in a compact and accessible area the range of wildlife, rare insects, plants and fungi, from sea to summit can be seen on the Ben Shieldaig Estate. Their presence helps us to understand what is happening to the habitat.</p> <p><b>Iconic species of Ben Shieldaig:</b> this incredible range includes white tailed and golden eagles, otters, red deer, pine marten, red squirrel, bryophytes and rainforest indicator species</p> <p><b>Nutrient flow:</b> The presence of a variety of wildlife contributes to creating healthy habitats for tree growth, which in turn supports increasing wildlife.</p>
<b>Revive:</b> Woodland Trust has exciting plans to manage the Ben Shieldaig Estate in a way that will restart the connection between habitats	<p><b>Connecting habitats:</b> the estate includes remnants of globally important, genetically unique species of pine and rainforest. WT will undertake planting and encourage natural regeneration to reconnect these across the estate and with neighbouring estates. The aim is to restart a cycle which has become damaged, correcting mistakes of the past.</p> <p><b>Threats:</b> WT's work to conserve and expand woodlands on the estate faces a number of threats - over-grazing by deer removing nutrients from the soil, destruction through disease and climate change. In the 1970s Ben Shieldaig forests were severely damaged by fire, another threat that WT will be alert to.</p> <p><b>Plans for the future:</b> tree planting, from seed to tree, improving the soil, reconnecting the mycorrhizal network between trees – Ben Shieldaig as a demonstration site (different plots for different trials) – very grand time-scale and landscape-scale for the project – links to Atlantic Woodland Alliance and neighbouring projects. Stewardship role for WT, community and visitors.</p>

#### 4.4 Methods of interpretation

Before identifying possible methods of interpretation, it is necessary to consider where this interpretation might take place. With no location for a site base for the Woodland Trust at present, it will be important that visitors can quickly recognise that Ben Shieldaig is a Woodland Trust site when they arrive, either from the direction of Torridon or Applecross. This suggests that there should be a combination of types and locations for interpretation, with a light touch on the ground and more in-depth interpretation made available digitally and via the Trust's activities programme.

#### **4.4.1 Locations**

Possible locations, existing or potential, discussed during the site visit and workshop are:

- Shieldaig village – panels on the external wall of the public toilet, in the playpark, posters on backs of toilet doors, community noticeboard
- Loch Dughaill passing place – can be extended into a car park
- Site base – possibly at the proposed Loch Dughaill car park
- Creation of a low-level pinewood trail from car park at end of Loch Dughaill
- Management track to Loch Damh beach
- Extension of path from Loch Damh to village
- Summit trail (or may just remain informal)
- Playpark – WT has an opportunity to contribute to the redevelopment of the playpark in Shieldaig. This could be a place to introduce some of the Trust’s interpretive messages, generically and more specifically around Ben Shieldaig, encouraging children (and their families) to enjoy natural play and signposting them to play in woodlands
- Marine Scotland shed (previously used as an interpretation room for the Scottish Government’s sea trout monitoring project). This space, located between Shieldaig and Kinloch, could be a useful space for activities but has very limited parking.
- Birch forest – access platform for immersion

#### **4.4.2 Printed or graphic material**

- Panels for potential interpretation hub at Loch Dughaill with story of the pinewood, the 1970s forest fire, reviving natural processes, linking with Kinloch Woodlands project
- Potential to have boards in village pointing people to the woods e.g. on external wall of public toilet; in playpark; posters on back of toilet doors; community noticeboard etc.
- Welcome ladders, information boards, orientation, maps of paths, e.g. at access points such as the management path to Loch Damh beach.
- Flier – a flier to promote the Ben Shieldaig Estate ‘revive’ project, combine with other attractions such as Kinloch Woodlands and the Peninsula Walk in Shieldaig
- Leaflet – standard WT site leaflet
- Illustrated map of the site

#### **4.4.3 On-site installation**

Dependent on the proposed Access Plan for BSE, the site is likely to be zoned, creating opportunities for different points of interpretation (similar to the approach taken at Ben Eighe National Nature Reserve). These zones will tie into neighbouring estates, encouraging collaboration and a holistic view of the area. The methods of on-site interpretation are:

- Path creation – linking with existing trails at Woodlands, which run to the end of Loch Dughaill along the side of the road. Provide seats / resting points to encourage folks to sit and admire, be, listen etc.
- Low-level pinewood trail - from car park at end of Loch Dughaill into pinewood for a more immersive experience that generates ‘wonder’
- A waymarked trail - an off-shoot of the low-level trail that will go further up the Ben, for the more intrepid/independent

- Summit trail from Glen Shieldaig (access by the transmitter) across multiple tops e.g. 'Hidden Lochan Trail'
- Trail development - could use QR codes to share additional information at points on the trail where there is 4G coverage On-site hide or shelter built into the hill e.g. for viewing raptors / getting out of the rain would have to be sighted carefully.
- Any hardware (benches, stiles, waymarks etc) can be considered as a location for additional layers of interpretation

#### **4.4.4 Digital or electronic**

- 'SituatE' app (already in use by WT for other sites) could be used to interpret the landscape at viewpoints, car parks and along walking routes
- Wildlife cameras – squirrel cam, eagle cam, summit cam – to either stream live footage to the WT website (which could also be displayed in the village) or to edit into a series of short thematic films
- Investigate the potential for live cameras (proximity of 4G masts) relaying footage to WT base and/or website
- A digital visualisation/time lapse of how the landscape was and how it might look again, initially for use on the website but which could tie in with VR/AR in the future

#### **4.4.5 Events and activities**

- Guided walks, talks demonstrations, events and workshops. This engagement programme enables additional, in-depth or targeted interpretation for local and visiting audiences
- Develop volunteers: for example, add to the body of Volunteer Speakers and Walk Leaders who can talk to the public about the Woodland Trust's work and sites and encourage volunteering to support the Trust's practical conservation activities, record wildlife and local programmes
- Geocaching
- Self-guided activities for adults and children e.g. wildlife spotter sheets, repurposing Nature Detective resources for Ben Shieldaig Estate

### **4.5 Interpretive Content**

Along with location and methods of evaluation, good interpretive content is what will engage audiences. The workshop identified various ideas and purposes for content. Existing content, local knowledge and stories from within the community of Shieldaig could be brought into the mix. Potential includes:

- Fixed point photography or drone-based surveys to evidence change over time. Drone footage could also be edited into a short film to demonstrate the size and scale of the landscape and to measure change over time

- Timeline – to give a sense of scale for the project, a timeline of forestation, past and into the future
- Integrate historic B&W imagery and stories of Ben Shieldaig in the past
- Static and/or animated illustrations and visualisations of landscape changes over time - then, now and future
- Macro photos / close views of nature
- Landscape views / labelled with what you can see
- Longer -term – films/articles of volunteers for general use by WT to reflect work in progress at Ben Shieldaig
- Artists' interventions – workshop participants were initially wary of using artwork in interpretation, but were more open to the idea once it was explained how this can be effective and non-intrusive
- Community input via WT social media
- Use of Gaelic – this was not discussed at the workshop, but clearly there is great potential to look at how Gaelic, for instance in place names, can add to our understanding to the environment, plus the connection of the Gaelic alphabet with native trees
- Wildlife – wildlife is a huge draw for visitors and can act as a way into the story of woods and trees as habitats
- Work-in-progress – illustrating the progress being made, through photography and film, voices of WT staff and volunteers
- Situate app – content can be managed and updated by the site team easily giving us the potential to change over time so it remains fresh
- A virtual or 360° tour of the site / select habitats / landscapes, particularly for those who are unable to visit the site

## 5. Programme and costs

### 5.1 Programme

The programme for introducing interpretation to the Ben Shieldaig Estate depends on further investigation of the site and the production of management and access plans. Some of the proposed interpretation can be achieved relatively quickly, some is for further down the line when the results of the Trust's work on the Estate starts to become visible. Some may lend itself well to community engagement, important for bringing the community along; and some may be suited to developing collaborations with other estate owners and land managers. The high level of support for the campaign to purchase the Estate suggests there is a strong public interest in the project, the Trust can use interpretation to keep this interest going. It is worth noting that generating and delivering interpretive content can be linked to the creation of learning resources and activities. Rather than defining a programme at such an early stage the Trust can consider implementing interpretation in the short to medium term:

#### Short/ medium term, 1-5 years

- Management plan out for consultation
- Welcome signage
- Illustrated map of the site with 2 to 3 walking routes
- Orientation board
- Car park extension at end of Loch Dughail complete
- Pinewood trail (from car park at end of Loch Dughail)
- Management track to Loch Damh beach
- Extension of path from Loch Damh to village
- Summit trail (or may just remain informal)
- Web content, e.g. drone footage, aerial flyover, wildlife film, panoramic photography, 'before and after' imagery
- Work with the local community and volunteers to help tell the story
- Playpark installations (need further appraisal)
- Artists' interventions
- Marine Scotland shed (needs further appraisal)
- Formative evaluation plan
- Evidence of progress that can be shared via website, site leaflet etc

### 5.2 Costs

As with the programme it is too early to suggest what the overall cost for interpretation of the site will be. The cost of standard WT methods of interpretation will be known in-house and can be managed as part of ongoing planning; bespoke methods of interpretation will need to be costed in more detail in due course and may need to be the subject of additional fundraising. The interpretation planning process has resulted in a 'menu' of options which can be considered in line with the Management and Access plans and budgets for the Estate.

**Menu:**

Panels and posters (design and production)  
Car park  
Site base  
Paths  
Seating  
Pinewood trail  
Summit trail  
Trail waymarkers  
Hide/shelter  
Birch forest platform  
Welcome ladders at Loch Damh and Loch Dughail  
Playpark installation  
Marine Scotland shed (fit-out)  
Flier  
Leaflet  
Map  
Situat App (content development)  
Wildlife cameras  
Live cameras  
Fixed point photography  
Drone footage  
Illustrations  
Photography  
Film footage  
Digital time-lapse  
Engagement programme



## 6. Management, maintenance and evaluation

### 6.1 Management and maintenance of interpretation

**Parking** – there is great pressure on available parking in the village; if the Woodland Trust builds a car park, e.g. at Loch Dughail, it will attract campervans; the Trust is not keen on providing any facilities that will encourage this (such as toilets) so will monitor how it is used. (If necessary, the Trust could look at ways to discourage campervans in the car parking area.)

**Welcome ladders and outdoor panels** - will need cleaning and maintenance

**Paths** - local path creation is complicated by Health and Safety and landownership issues. Paths will need upkeep.

**Trails** - upkeep of trail and anything sited on the trail (waymarkers, hide/shelter, seating)

**Seating** - can cause erosion – requires careful consideration of location of benches

**Fliers and leaflets** – these have a high initial outlay for design and production, but a flier could be productive locally for promoting understanding and engagement with the aims and work of the Trust

**Apps/downloads for smartphones** - can detract from personal connection to surroundings which perhaps undermines the objectives of the interpretation. Use of Apps and smartphones is something that could be tested more with visitors before any investment is made. Any digital media will need to be updated to keep it fresh, relevant and user-friendly.

**Website** - content needs updating, long-term illustration of change over time through use of drone footage etc needs investment

**Cameras** - will require maintenance

**Geocaching** - will need constant updating

**Management of maintenance on site** – low maintenance ideally; with potential to garner volunteer support to maintain on site interpretation

### 6.2 Evaluation

As the Trust will be introducing interpretation for the first time at Ben Shieldaig Estate there is no baseline data to work from. The 'light-touch' survey that was carried out in winter 2019-20 provides a small amount of data as a useful starting point. The Trust should consider, in addition, conducting more in-depth survey work to generate a socio-economic baseline which can be used to measure future impact. The aim will be to establish baseline data for the Trust's overall objectives and for the community objectives identified through the local survey, presented in the table below:

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Evaluation method</b>
<b>Refreshment</b>	experiences that promote physical and mental refreshment	visitor feedback
<b>Connection</b>	experiences that enhance connection with trees, nature and with others	visitor feedback
<b>Wonder</b>	experiences that reveal the wonder of wood and trees	visitor feedback, levels of digital interaction
<b>Action</b>	experiences that showcase our work, promote our cause, and provide opportunities to stand up for woods and trees	numbers of new members, levels of engagement in activities, level of volunteering
<b>Social</b>	experiences that bring members of the community together through shared participation in the Trust's activities programme and through volunteering	community feedback (survey and anecdotal), levels of engagement in activities and volunteering
<b>Economic</b>	creating a high-quality visitor experience that will encourage increased use of local accommodation, food, retail and activities providers	feedback from local businesses
<b>Educational</b>	activities that will enhance the range of opportunities for schools and lifelong learners	feedback from participants in formal and informal learning activities

## Appendix 1 – Workshop notes

### Comments on visitors

- Audience has changed since NC500 arrived. Used to be older couples and repeat visitors who stayed longer (up to a week at a time) and made a point of getting outdoor and mixing with local people. Now tourists largely stay 1 night, have less time to engage and don't always get out of their cars (beyond the tearoom). NC500ers have displaced older people who dislike driving on busy roads and are less inclined to book ahead.
- There are more visitors, they are more diverse, definitely more cyclists and mountain bikers that a few years ago.
- Lots of people do come back to stay for 1+ night, having travelled through the village previously (on NC500). It's not all passing trade, visitors will stop where there are things to do. NC500 brings visitors who seek:
- Exploration / low level adventure i.e. a walk around the peninsula. Visitors will have sense of wonder but know little.
- Facilitated experiences e.g. organised activities like kayaking, sailing, caves etc.
- Self-led adventure i.e. long-distance walkers or Munro baggers, those who have a pre – existing plan
- We definitely have more visitors, there are many more holiday homes than in the past, and people tend to come for 2-3 days rather than 1 week. Visitors tend to be folks who love the area /repeat visitors. We get the full spectrum of folks i.e. those that like the outdoors and need little guidance to those who want lots of info and we need to provide a range of information to get them to engage with nature.

### What benefits do the community want to see?

- Not necessarily more people. But better educated visitors, more sustainable behaviour (no litter, trampling, dumping waste inappropriately etc.)
- Would like to see the mountain used as a facility for health & well-being, all year round. Just like the peninsula walk. It'd be another option to disperse visitors from the busy village and another reason for them to stay longer. Peninsula track may be reaching the point at which foot traffic is disrupting wildlife.
- When staff at Nanny's direct families to the peninsula walk and give in depth, face to face info, the families almost always come back to say thanks. There is no existing interpretation (or info?) re that walk. Land and paths are privately owned.
- Accessibility and the path is what make a difference. Ideally Ben Shieldaig would have a circular / link path, from the village, wide enough for families to walk / ride on (like some in Cairngorms). Don't need to be too precious about wilderness, some interpretation would be welcomed.
- Ideal path would be one main path with opportunities to roam informally off that track. Beinn Eighe nature trails are much loved, esp. multi-use path which hand bikes can use. An accessible Shieldaig roadside path to Loch Dughail would be great. Bike groups could possibly help maintain (bikers spend money often visit with families). MTB tracks on Ben Shieldaig

requested by younger audiences. Certainly, a path from the village out to the hill (avoiding busy traffic roads for kids) would be good.

- Beware of need to update interpretation for repeat visitors. Local need should be considered also.
- 'Don't be too rigid re the boundaries' (sea trout project links to riparian planting; Kinloch planting introduces residence in the wider landscape etc)