

ROOFING THE ATLANTIC ISLANDS CENTRE

INTRODUCTION

The slate quarries of the Isle of Luing produced millions of slates that have been used on roofs of buildings all around the world, and it would be logical to expect that a building celebrating the heritage of the slate islands would use slate from some of these same quarries or at the very least from other Scottish quarries. However no roofing slate has been produced in Scotland since the early 1950's and currently all new roofing slate has to be imported to Scotland, some from Wales, but mostly from Spain. The use of West Highland roofing slate was a condition of the Planning Permission granted for the Atlantic Islands Centre, suggesting that the only option was to specify recycled slates, but this has proved difficult to achieve. This factsheet explains why it has been necessary to amend the Planning condition and use an alternative to West Highland slate on the roof of the new Atlantic Islands Centre.



SCOTTISH SLATE ROOFS

The relatively small and thick Scottish slates seen on many traditional Scottish buildings were produced in a variety of lengths and widths, and laid with the largest slates at the base of the roof, with the smaller ones at the top. This method was introduced for purely economic reasons. It made best use of all the material produced and resulted in the unique roofscapes we enjoy today. Each roof slope bears a fingerprint of the quarry that supplied the material, with the pattern of diminishing courses, and the colour and textures all being highly distinctive.

While Scottish slate is particularly well suited for use as a roofing material and is of proven durability, like all natural materials, slates can over time undergo changes that make them vulnerable to breakages and affect their performance. This generates a demand for matching slates for repair and maintenance of existing roofs, particularly on listed buildings, but with no new Scottish slate available, supplies of slate for this purpose must come from the limited resource of recycled Scottish slate. This resource is diminishing fast as fewer slate roofed buildings are being demolished. At the same time as historic buildings age and require more maintenance, demand for re-cycled slate is increasing. This limits the availability of recycled slate for use on new buildings.

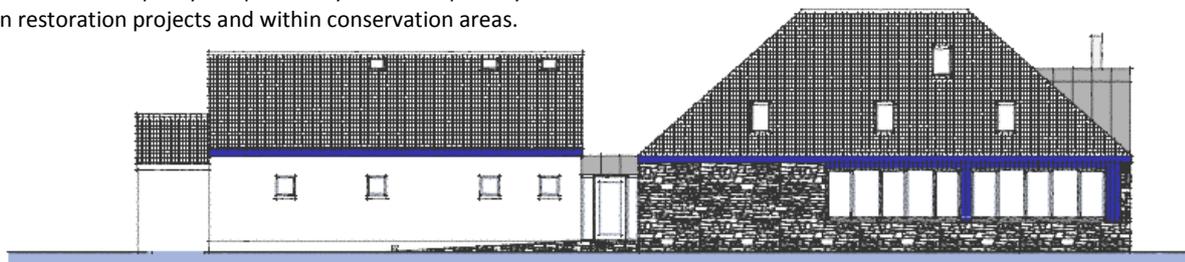


FACTORS AFFECTING THE USE OF RECYCLED SLATE

- Quantity – the number of slates required means that they would need to come from a variety of sources and therefore would be subject to variation in size, thickness, colour, quality, etc.
- Quality – recycled slates come with no details of age or provenance and will have been on a roof for anything between 60 and 100 years so there is no guarantee of their future durability.
- Cost of supplying recycled slates – recycled slates are more expensive than new slates, even although the majority of new slates have to be imported from Spain.
- Additional cost of preparing recycled slates – If sufficient supply of slates can be obtained there is additional labour involved in sorting and re-dressing the slates before they can be used.
- Wastage – after sorting and re-dressing up to 80% of recycled slates can be rejected as being unsuitable for use.

NEW SLATE

The use of recycled slate on new buildings is no longer considered a good use of this diminishing resource, so new slate is being proposed for the Atlantic Islands Centre. It comes from the Matacouta quarry in NW Spain and has been selected because of its similarities to Scottish slate. (90% of the natural slate currently used in Europe comes from quarries in Spain.) It is produced to a consistent quality and has been tested in accordance with EN12326, carries a CE marking, and is supplied with a 75 year guarantee. Slate from this quarry has previously been accepted by Historic Scotland on restoration projects and within conservation areas.



SUMMARY

- New roofing slates from Luing quarries are not available.
- Supplies of re-cycled slate are limited, costly and of variable size and quality.
- Re-cycled slates need lots more preparation.
- New slates are guaranteed for 75 years
- Proposed slate is accepted by Historic Scotland for use in conservation areas.
- Luing slate will be used for the walls of the new building.

For more information contact:

Andrew Pinkerton
 Project Development Manager
 07899 798556

andrew@atlanticislandscentre.com

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