

Fears that Bruce-linked island will be sold as multimillionaire's toy

Rare plantation of yew trees which were used by Scots king for longbows 'could be changed forever'

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

CONSERVATIONISTS fear an island in Loch Lomond with links to Robert the Bruce could become "a multimillionaire's toy" after it was put up for sale.

Inchonaig Island, which means the Island of Yew Trees, has been described

as "the ultimate in private retreats" and is available for offers over £995,000.

Yew trees on the 182-acre island were used to make longbows for Robert the Bruce's army at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 and trees planted by the Scots king to replace them still grow on the island over 700 years on.

Savills, the selling agents, say the island represents an "incredible and rare opportunity to acquire a piece of Scottish history" in "the spectacular surroundings of Loch Lomond and the National Park" and a closing date for bids has been set for midday tomorrow.

However, conservationists Scotland's Yew Tree Heritage Initiative (SYTHI) say that Inchonaig is home to a unique habitat that could be damaged by any potential development.

Paul Greenwood, of SYTHI, said: "Britain is like a Noah's Ark for ancient yew tree sites. Most of western Europe had their ancient yew trees wiped out for the longbow trade 500 years ago but there are over 2,000 sites in Britain.

"Most of these are connected with people - churchyards, gardens or estates - but Inchonaig is absolutely unique. There is no other island habitat

It will be sold as multimillionaire's toy

"There is no other island habitat in the western hemisphere with yew trees that span to over 700 years'

in the western hemisphere that I am aware of with a population of yew trees that span 300 years to over 700 years. That's how important it is.

"These yews go back to Robert the Bruce, who harvested a lot of them for longbows - so the trees on the island contributed to the victory at Bannock-

burn. He replaced these with yews that still exist. He said the island became famous after being visited by Boswell and Johnson in the late 1700s but warned: "It seems to be a multimillionaire's or billionaire's toy to own an island now and our fear is that it will be developed and most of the habitat is altered in a way that changes it forever. Leaving it as it is is the greatest attraction that the place could have."

The island, the most northern in Loch Lomond, already contains a two-bedroom cottage with no connected services and three derelict both-

ies, as well as a jetty for launching and landing boats.

The agents say that while the cottage has been used for holiday rentals, there "are potential development opportunities in the form of the three derelict stone bothy buildings... subject to acquiring necessary consents".

Cameron Ewer, handling the sale for Savills, added: "Loch Lomond, its islands and the views from them are not only iconic in Scotland but internationally recognisable.

"To have the opportunity to own one, well that's truly special."