

Call of the wild

By Lucinda Cameron

HE has already courted controversy with his plans to reintroduce wolves, bears and boar to the Highlands.

But now entrepreneur Paul Lister is turning his attention from creatures of the wild to residents of the urban jungle.

The millionaire businessman plans to open a so-called 'eco-academy' for young offenders on his northern estate.

He hopes to give troubled teens the chance to turn their lives around at the £1million centre by helping them to develop moral values and a strong work ethic.

Youngsters at the facility could find themselves planting

Entrepreneur plans eco-academy for young offenders on his estate

trees, monitoring local species and getting involved in other projects aimed at regenerating the land.

Mr Lister, 46, said: 'I strongly believe in the importance of giving people a second chance and this would be a way of putting this into practice.'

'We hope to work not just with children from local schools, but also with kids from the inner cities.'

'We might even get involved in taking alcohol and drug abusers

who are in recovery alongside other young offenders.'

Mr Lister, son of the co-founder of the MFI furniture chain, plans to model the academy on the Willow School in New Jersey, which cites ecology and the environment as its core values.

He said: 'The Willow School in the U.S. is incredibly successful in connecting children with the environment and making them feel more responsible human beings.'

'The programme there imparts

them with strong values, ethics and morals and we will adapt this for the Highlands of Scotland.'

'We will cherry-pick the best elements that have worked over there.'

The entrepreneur hopes to get the project up and running within the next two years, and plans to run the 30-bed academy as a charity on ten acres of land near the entrance to his 23,000-acre Alladale estate, north of Inverness.

Mr Lister will donate £100,000 of his own money and hopes charities will help fund the remainder of the £1million it is estimated the project will cost.

He is currently in talks with the Wilderness Foundation, a charity that works with the British probationary services and social service agencies to develop outdoors activity projects for young offenders.

He is also keen for the centre to be the most environmentally-friendly building in the north of Scotland.

Mr Lister said: 'We are really keen to get this off the ground and, over the next two years, we are going to design, build and open this learning centre.'

'We will be using reclaimed wood and other recycled material, wool for installation, as well as minimising light pollution and harvesting rainwater.'

Mary Scanlon, Conservative MSP



Second chance: Landowner Paul Lister

for the Highlands, last night sounded a note of caution about the scheme. She said: 'Some young offenders are persistent and habitual, and a short spell of time on this estate would be unlikely to turn this around.'

'It may be beneficial for some, but there would have to be proper and robust supervision in place.'

Mr Lister's plans to open a mini-reserve on his land are also progressing, and he hopes a 1,000-acre reserve housing wild boar, red and roe deer and European elk will be open by next autumn.

He hopes to reintroduce wolves, bears, lynx and European bison into a 50,000-acre fenced reserve by 2009.

His vision is to restore the original Highland eco-system in a managed wilderness environment and he also wants to recreate the ancient Caledonian forest by replanting trees.