



## **Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership Advisory Board – minutes of meeting**

**20<sup>th</sup> February 2012, Pulteney Centre, Wick**

### **Present:**

Cllr Ian Ross (Chairman); Cllr David Flear; Cllr George Farlow; Trudy Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce); Neil Robertson (Caithness Chamber of Commerce); Simon Coles (HIE); John Green (Caithness Partnership); Lesley Cranna (Scottish Natural Heritage); Gordon Mackenzie (Scrabster Harbour Trust); Ken Nicol (DSRL); Anna MacConnell (Nuclear Decommissioning Authority); June Love (Dounreay Stakeholder Group); Ian Carse (Skills Development Scotland); Eann Sinclair (CNSRP); Iona Gunn (CNSRP – minutes); William Gilfilan (Highland Council); Andy McCann (Highland Council); David Sutherland (Highland Council)

### **Apologies**

Billy Manson (Association of Caithness Community Councils), Derrick Milnes (Thurso & Wick Trades Union Council), Frances Gunn (Federation of NW Community Councils), Gordon Jenkins (North Highland College), Cllr Gail Ross; Ronnie Johnston (Dounreay Stakeholder Group); Cllr Sandy Park; Sandy Mackie (Scrabster Harbour Trust); Simon Middlemas (DSRL); Steven Sutherland (Caithness Chamber); Stuart Black (Highland Council).

In the absence of Cllr Sandy Park it was agreed that Cllr Ian Ross would chair the meeting. The Chairman welcomed everyone and thanked staff from Pulteneytown People's Project for the tour around the new Pulteney Centre. It was agreed that it is an excellent example of what can be achieved through partnership working.

### **Previous Minutes:**

These were approved without amendment.

### **Actions arising:**

Action 2 – local representatives had a meeting with The Crown Estate, at which it was agreed that communication has to improve. TCE has agreed to send someone to each future Advisory Board to help this process. A written report was due for this meeting, but had not been received. J Love said the Dounreay Stakeholder Group awaits a written response to its correspondence.

S Sutherland from Caithness Chamber had previously highlighted the lack of promised information flow from the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Delivery Group. It was agreed that this continued to be an issue. E Sinclair was asked to draft a letter from the Advisory Board to request better flow of information. **ACTION 12/02/01** E Sinclair to draft letter to PFOWLF

Action 3 – Scottish Power Renewables have agreed the Terms of Reference for a joint grouping with the Advisory Board, but the group has not yet met. SPR has had an internal reorganisation, but E Sinclair reported that he hoped the subgroup would have a meeting by the end of March. In the meantime SPR's community engagement

contractor in Caithness is EnergyHunt, who have just opened an office in Traill House in Thurso, next door to the CNSRP office.

**Action 4** – Since the meeting S Black has reported back to PED Committee re Vulcan. Rolls Royce's view of future operations in Caithness is still a positive one. J Love said that Rolls Royce/ MoD remained members of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group, and that DSG would maintain close contact over the future of the facility, both in terms of Rolls Royce plans and MoD decisions on decommissioning.

#### **Programme Manager update**

E Sinclair highlighted that so far during 2011/12 Business Gateway, HIE and NHRF had supported the creation and/ or retention of 115 jobs in the area (82 Jobs created and 33 retained). He also circulated a chart showing sectoral breakdown of these figures. The Partnership's 2011-14 projections for job opportunities assumed an average of 66-136 jobs per year, so the figures represent encouraging levels of business confidence in difficult economic times. E Sinclair also pointed to the encouraging movement of companies from Business Gateway support to account-management through HIE.

He also highlighted the recent announcements regarding the designation of land at Scrabster as an "enterprise area" and the likely future designation of the Pentland Firth area as a Marine Energy Park. More detail on the characteristics of the Enterprise Area will be announced soon. Marine Energy Park will hopefully be secured by the end of July. E Sinclair agreed to circulate the SW England Marine Energy park presentation. **ACTION 12/02/02** – ES to circulate presentation.

The MEP is likely to be steered by the Pentland Firth Orkney Waters Leadership Forum. E Sinclair will attend the next meeting of that group in mid-March, deputising for S Black.

N Robertson asked if it was still the Partnership's intention to use a subgroup of local energy sector contacts to work on energy-related topics. E Sinclair said that this remained the case, and highlighted the joint subgroup with SPR as an example of this.

Wick Harbour Study – almost complete, and Wick Harbour Authority will very soon be doing presentations on key opportunities for the port, including offshore wind and oil & gas.

A McCann said that Highland Council is completing an audit of industrial sites in Caithness, and will now issue a "call for sites" to draw out any additional interest. Two renewable energy-related Masterplanning exercises are also planned for Scrabster/ west Thurso and Wick Harbour/ Lower Pulteneytown. All with the intention of bringing the results back to Council around August/ September.

Transport – HiTrans and the Highland Council commissioned a study on the "internal" roads infrastructure of Caithness as it related to the energy sector. The final report and appendix is available to download from the CNSRP website at <http://www.cnsrp.org.uk/downloads/>

The CNSRP Delivery Group recently discussed Wick airport's important role as an asset for the area. T Morris said that she had recently met HIAL CEO and Chairman and HIAL's only remit was to maintain the airport, connectivity being the carriers' roles. It was agreed that it was crucial that the airport was seen as being "open for business" – ideally 7 day opening - and that key infrastructure such as the Hangar

(which is in Council ownership) needed to be addressed. Cllr D Flear agreed that the future of the Hangar should be on Council's agenda. A MacConnell said that HIE had done work on airport issues some time ago, and they should be involved in the discussion.

**ACTION 12/02/03** – T Morris to discuss options with CNSRP Delivery Group and HIAL

**ACTION 12/02/04** – D Sutherland to provide information on Hangar fees etc.

**ACTION 12/02/05** – E Sinclair to involve Delivery group in supporting solutions.

Cllr D Flear asked for the latest progress re: Berriedale Braes to be raised at the Executive Board, given recent more positive approaches from Transport Scotland. Highland Council will be meeting Transport Scotland next week, and have said that Berriedale is a key priority.

Socio-economic Impact of Dounreay Decommissioning: study now at draft final stage. Consultants findings support the view that the area economy has begun to diversify away from dependence on Dounreay. Also an endorsement of the Partnership's enabling role in this process. E Sinclair will circulate report findings when available, and will arrange for a formal presentation from the consultants.

**ACTION 12/02/06** – E Sinclair to circulate report findings

**ACTION 12/02/07** – E Sinclair to arrange presentation of Final Report

### **Inward Investment update**

S Coles said his secondment ends in May 2012. Discussion is currently taking place on what resource will be put in place beyond May. Caithness Ambassadors network is beginning to produce leads. The relationship with SDI is improving and is highlighting potential leads. HIE hosted a useful visit last week from SDI's director of inward investment, during which stakeholders were able to discuss progress. Useful developments ideas from SDI include working with recruitment/ relocation agencies to highlight the "resource pipeline" we can offer in the north, and the value of locating work in Caithness rather than overheated economies such as Aberdeen.

Caithness Chamber of Commerce has just completed a mini-tender commission from HIE on environmental monitoring sector opportunities. Its increased focus should make following up leads easier. Also, our "offer" should become more focused on offering solutions rather than simply highlighting features.

***Cllr D Flear, D Sutherland and W Gilfillan left the meeting at this point.***

### **Member updates:**

**Scottish Natural Heritage** – L Cranna highlighted SNH's role in pre-application planning for renewable energy developments. She stressed the value of engaging SNH early in this process, to avoid delays and additional project expenditure. Also SNH has just published a study on 30 years of Cetacean sightings in the Pentland Firth and around Orkney. This report is available to view at

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1875>

**Highland Council** - G Farlow expressed concerns about tourism in the north, and was particularly concerned at ongoing problems with perceptions from Inverness tourism sources that there is nothing north of the Kessock bridge. ACTION - A McCann agreed to take this issue back for discussion.

A McCann also reported that Business gateway continued to be busy, with encouraging numbers of new business start-ups. He confirmed that the Business

Gateway review for the Highland Council area had been completed and was submitted to the PED Committee in January. T Morris felt that insufficient human resources were allocated to BG in the Caithness area. The Chairman encouraged the Chamber to write to the Council with concerns. **ACTION 12/02/08** – T Morris to write to A McCann re Business Gateway.

**Skills Development Scotland** - I Carse said he was working with colleagues to develop a package of skills offers to businesses, both at a Highland and a Caithness/ North Sutherland level. Also the Highland Youth Summit will be held in Inverness on 25<sup>th</sup> of March.

**Scrabster Harbour Trust** – G Mackenzie said that the development of the old fish market pier is now just over 50% complete. Dredging works will start April/ May and will be done in 2 phases. Works programme remains on target for a 27<sup>th</sup> July completion, and remains on budget. The local economy has benefited from construction works. The Trust welcomes the announcement on the Enterprise Area – business interest in the port is high, with an upsurge since development work started, as companies become more aware of the port's potential. Business has been good with oil & gas and renewables clients. Also 35,000 tones of timber has been shipped through the harbour. The fishing sector has been less busy, but the Trust hopes the new refrigeration facilities will help. Cruise market continues to grow, with 13 visiting ships this year, bringing up to 4,000 passengers to the area. The Trust is very grateful to the Council for providing the shuttle bus service into Thurso.

**Chamber of Commerce** – N Robertson said that the Young Chamber being set up by CCoC could potentially help with Youth Summit actions. T Morris said that the "Spend it Here" loyalty card has been well received, with orders having to be placed for an additional 1,000 cards on top of the original 2,000 already issued. She thanked Council service points, Dounreay.com and Caithness Horizons for handing them out. The initial scheme runs until the end of May 2012. The Chamber also ran a Food and Drink event during February, leading to some actions. A workshop on procurement was also held, with positive feedback from attendees.

**DSRL** – Babcock Dounreay partnership is now preferred bidder for the PBO contract at Dounreay. BDP is going through transition phase, until formal share transfer takes place on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Until that point the current DSRL management team remain in control of site. Rodger Hardy will be the new managing Director of DSRL.

Caithness Partnership - John Green said that the Partnership proposes to continue working with community councils, gathering details from each of one priority activity for their own area. The Caithness Partnership is to concentrate further on the Caithness Transport Forum taking on the role of "delivery partner for transport" within the CNSRP plan. DSRL has committed a 3 year funding package to Caithness Partnership. The Highland Council has also pledged ongoing support and we are very grateful to both parties. Match funding opportunities are currently being sourced. The Caithness Transport Forum met in January this year and it was a very well attended and positive meeting. AECOM presented their "Caithness Internal Transport Connectivity Study". There has been ongoing dialogue with Transport Scotland regarding Berriedale Braes and a meeting arranged for 28<sup>th</sup> February with NDA, THC, Hitrans and Caithness Partnership to discuss improvements. The Development Officer has also been working with Wick Harbour Authority on developing its marina infrastructure - DSRL and THC have both committed funding towards toilets, showers and a drying room to enhance marina facilities. Development Officer is also assisting with planning and funding of Wick Diamond Jubilee HarbourFest event; Caithness Environmental Fund is nearing full commitment.

**NDA** – A MacConnell reported that NDA remains very busy with arrangements for the new PBO. NDA is currently considering several major project applications. Caithness & North Sutherland Fund met to discuss its first application round, at which 8 applications were discussed. The next round of applications also looks like being well supported.

**Dounreay Stakeholder Group** – J Love reported that an external review of future DSG strategy was being finalised. NDA has issued a paper on Credible Options for “exotic fuels” currently onsite at Dounreay: a DSG response is being prepared. DSG has also written to Tesco about the lack of progress with its proposed development at the former Thurso Mart. DSG has also this week written to Sir Anthony Cleaver asking whether Caithness was considered for a proposal to host the Green Investment Bank.

**Any other business:**

N Robertson asked if the private sector could provide any further support to activities at Geogemas.

G Farlow asked about recent media stories of skills shortages, and whether any steps were being taken locally. The Chairman said that there were numerous plans being taken forward both in the north and Highland-wide to address skills issues for the future. E Sinclair pointed to the good work being done at schools level through the STEM project, and praised local engineering companies for coming together to organise the recent future skills evening at North Highland College, where many local students came to find out about opportunities. A MacConnell also mentioned North Highland College’s recent work to address issues with the funding of Modern Apprenticeships, and I Carse spoke of the supportive actions of the Scottish Government on youth employability.

E Sinclair reported that this would be the final Advisory Board meeting before Council elections in May, and that Board members Cllr D Flear, Cllr S Park and Cllr I Ross will be standing down as Councillors. He thanked the Councillors for the valuable support they have given to the Partnership over the past four years. In response the Chairman thanked members for the opportunity to participate in such a positive programme of activities.

**Summary of agreed actions:**

<b>Ref:</b>	<b>Action:</b>	<b>Responsible Person:</b>	<b>Due Date:</b>
01	Draft letter to PFOWLF	ES	07/03/12
02	Circulate SW Marine presentation	ES	02/03/12
03	Discuss airport options with HIAL	TM	09/03/12
04	Provide information on Hangar fees etc	DS	02/03/12
05	Involve Delivery group in supporting solutions at airport.	ES	02/03/12
06	Circulate Dounreay Socio-economic Impact report findings	ES	16/03/12
07	Arrange presentation of Final Report	ES	30/03/12
08	Write to A. McCann re Business Gateway resources	TM	16/03/12