

Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership

Advisory Board meeting

28th August 2012, T3UK, Janetstown, by Thurso

Present: Cllr D Hendry (chairman), Cllr G Ross, Cllr G Farlow, Cllr R Saxon, D Milnes (Thurso & Wick Trades Council), A MacConnell (NDA), B Manson (Assoc of Caithness CCs), F Gunn (Sutherland Partnership), D McBeath (N Highland College), A Macdonald (Babcock Dounreay Partnership), B Baxter, S Sutherland & N Dreaves (Caithness Chamber of Commerce), J Green (Caithness Partnership), K Nicol (DSRL), L Cranna (SNH), , Rev R Johnstone (DSG), R Kirk (HIE), J Love (HIE), S Mackie (Scrabster Harbour Trust), S Campbell (Skills Development Scotland), S Black & D Sutherland (THC), E Sinclair (CNSRP), E Gunn (CNSRP).

Apologies: Cllr T Prag, J Robertson (Crown Estate), T Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce).

1. Chairman Cllr D Hendry opened the meeting. New members Cllr R. Saxon, B. Baxter (Caithness Chamber of Commerce and S. Campbell (Skills Development Scotland) were welcomed to their first meeting.
2. Previous minutes were agreed without amendment.
3. Forward Plans
 - HIE's 2020 Vision
R Kirk outlined HIE's current engagement including account management of around 50 companies and shared HIE's vision for the economy of Caithness and north Sutherland in 2020 as a dynamic, mixed, balanced and growing economy. Comments on the vision are welcome, intend to finalise by end September.

Comments from members:

- Marketing of Tourism not joined up (events in the area not marketed in VS media). Natural Retreats/ Heritage GB may have an interest in marketing events to customers.
- Timescales for the rollout of superfast broadband seem to have slipped to 2015: can this be accelerated? R. Kirk said that although agreement of the overall contract may have slipped work is still due to commence in 2013 and benefits will be realised as soon as the work has commenced. **ACTION 1 - E Sinclair** to write to BT regarding timescales for the work that BT has publicly stated will be undertaken.
- Question whether anything is happening with data centres. R. Kirk confirmed that discussions are still ongoing with companies regarding datacentres.
- Question whether this area could have an opportunity for a skills academy similar to what is available at Nigg. R Kirk said that the academy at Nigg was commercially driven by the needs of one large employer. The North Highland College apprenticeship programme also draws on local employers' partnership for support and is an excellent start.
- Dounreay's Socio Economic Development Plan 2012 – 2015
A Macdonald gave a presentation on Dounreay's Socio Economic Development Plan which is open for comments, a key message being that the Dounreay partners are not leading, but working in partnership with agencies.
 - Note that the area will get on better if they worked together rather than in competition with each other, for example in retail.
 - R. Johnston (DSG) questioned the commitment in the Plan to address supply chain opportunities within the procurement of contracts. A. Macdonald confirmed that DSRL is working on this issue.

4. The Crown Estate Update

Apologies had been received from The Crown Estate that no representative was available to attend. A written update had been circulated to members. **ACTION 2 - E Sinclair** to write to TCE regarding attendance at meetings.

 - Highland Council stated their position is that they would like to see local control of The Crown Estate in Scotland.
 - Question whether information on which groups have received funding from the Coastal Communities Fund is public. Would also like feedback so that unsuccessful groups may improve their bids for next time.

5. Programme Manager Update
 - The Socio Economic Impacts of Dounreay decommissioning

E Sinclair gave an update on information from the Study, which highlighted the changing impact of Dounreay on the area's economy. Notably, the area's dependence on Dounreay work has decreased since the previous study was carried out in 2006. Similarly, a survey of supply chain companies carried out for the Study showed that dependence on Dounreay contracts had decreased since 2006, whilst around 80% of companies surveyed had seen turnover increase over the same period. The study also highlighted that more Dounreay workers saw a future for themselves in the area beyond their Dounreay work, and that more workers would consider staying to set up their own business. Business start-up rates have also improved. The Study also suggested that CNSRP had played a "decisive" role in leading this process of change.

 - Project level priorities

E Sinclair gave a verbal update on this process, which identifies projects a "pipeline" of projects for partners to examine with a view to supporting. CNSRP's Delivery Group have decided to look at several project-level priorities in the immediate future, each of which would bring jobs. These are either existing business growth or inward investments. Partners will be asked to examine how they might jointly support these projects, so that resources can be prioritised accordingly.

 - CNSRP Communications

A good rate of press coverage has been achieved - a rate of approximately 1 per week. S Black and E Sinclair had attended the first Caithness & Sutherland Area Committee meeting of the Highland Council to present a paper on the Partnership. It was well received, but a question was raised as to why Partnership meetings were not held in public. E Sinclair had agreed to raise this issue with Advisory Board members.

 - After discussion amongst members it was unanimously agreed that the value of the Partnership forums was their ability to discuss important issues frankly in order to achieve results. It was also agreed that there were appropriate public discussion opportunities at both the Area Committee and the Dounreay Stakeholder Group, to which the CNSRP Programme Manager provides regular written reports. However, a press release could be sent after each CNSRP Advisory/ Executive Board meeting **ACTION 3 - E. Sinclair.**
 - Also discussed at Highland Council Area Committee was Wick Airport. Cllr G Ross asked for members to provide her with any comments on the importance of the airport to the area's economy. **ACTION 4 - ALL.** HIAL is undertaking a business development plan for Wick Airport. E. Sinclair will find out timescale **ACTION 5 - E. Sinclair.** A Macdonald said that a multi-agency approach will assist Wick Airport development.

6. Inward Investment progress Report
 - R Kirk reported that Simon Coles' secondment from Babcock to HIE is now complete, and June Love has now been seconded for a period of one year from Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd. HIE would like to thank Babcock and DSRL for their support. June Love will continue to build on the Caithness Ambassadors programme and following up on existing leads as well as generating new leads.

John O'Groats is progressing well with the £6 million development. The additional 39 units at John O'Groats should have a positive effect on many other companies. The newly opened cinema has had 10,000 visitors in its first month. R Kirk was hopeful that an announcement in Business Services sector will be forthcoming.

7. Member Updates

- Highland Council

Cllr G Ross reported a positive first Area Committee meeting. She welcomed a move away from local competitiveness towards joined-up working. Cllr R Saxon commented on the cruise ships coming into Scrabster bringing 700-800 tourists. Activities and an itinerary to capitalise on them would be beneficial.

S Black said that Business Gateway shows continued success with 8 business start up's in Caithness and 7 in Sutherland so far this year. D Sutherland said that the contract to build the new Council office in Wick is due to be agreed.

- Sutherland Partnership

F Gunn discussed a paper from Melness & Tongue Community Development Trust (circulated to members) regarding the most beneficial location of an exchange to be upgraded as part of the rollout of Next generation Broadband. Members agreed that the exchange at Bettyhill offered best coverage along the north coast. The Sutherland Youth Summit will focus on jobs, education and health. Visit Sutherland 2014 is being looked at by Sutherland Partnership. Other benefits have come from HIE, Lottery, Climate change funds and CANS fund. Benefits have been insulations managers, Mackay Country manager, progress with the Wild North festival.

- Caithness Partnership

A recent count has shown that the work of the Caithness Partnership has brought £1.2 million into Caithness. Many thanks to Koreen MacDougall who has now left Caithness Partnership. Caithness Transport Forum had started discussions with NDA re additional loops in the train line between Georgemas and Inverness so trains can pass allowing more trains on the line.

- Caithness Chamber of Commerce

Chamber is very busy and is still the fastest growing in Scotland but cannot be sustained on membership fees alone. Would like to see the rollout of superfast broadband progress by the date publicised. Currently advertising for a Management Accountant. Town Centre project is due to end this year. Plans to offer training on customer care and marketing. Supply chain training is still continuing for next few months. Innovation challenge is on its second round, with the winner announced at Chamber dinner. Invest Caithness plans are - attendance at Scottish Renewables Conference and Decomm North Sea Conference and an update to the website, adding case studies. Continued frustration re tourism in the county – it is hoped that the current piece of HIE work being undertaken by Glasgow School of Art may bring delivery and make someone accountable for tourism.

- Dounreay Stakeholder Group

DSG have commented on Dounreay Socio Economic Plan 2012-2015. DSG external review recommended that the DSG focuses on site issues, and its recommendations are now being taken forward by a subgroup of DSG members. DSG are liaising with DSRL regarding socio economic elements in site contracts.

- Thurso & Wick Trades Council

D. Milnes said he was aware that the Wick HMRC office was given a reprieve until March 2014, but was unsure what action is being taken in support of this facility in the meantime.

ACTION 6 - Cllr D Hendry to remind Councillors of the issue.

- Skills Development Scotland

SDS operating plan is available on the website. Labour market info is available on the website mentality. PACE networks are in place with one PACE situation currently running. There is a change in learning to become more relevant to work with a minimum of 192 hours work experience and the same number of hours learning.

- North Highland College
Currently undergoing strategic rationalisation and reinvigorating the college governance. North Highland College has received £400,000 from Scottish Funding Council. First Minister will officially open the ETEC and CfEE facilities on 30th August.
- Scottish Natural Heritage
SNH are a Scottish Govt advisory body for renewables, and have undertaken works such as basking sharks research and cumulative impacts on birds, as well as research on flight and feeding activity of geese and swans. SNH believe that energy efficiency will play an important part in meeting the Scottish Govt's 2020 targets. SNH carbon management plan can be made available to other organisations.
- Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
The national nuclear archive proposal is currently going through a governance process, then will go through DECC to Treasury for approval. Commercialisation of rail-freight terminal at Georgemas is being taken forward with due consideration of issues associated with access to and from the A9 Trunk Road.
- Association of Caithness Community Councils
Community councils are frustrated by the lack of a joined up tourism offering. Maintaining employment in Caithness is important. Also concern over the cost of flights from Caithness-Aberdeen.
- Scrabster Harbour Trust
Phase one of the harbour development is now due for completion by October. The Trust has had strong interest from oil & gas and renewables companies. Phase Two developments will take lessons learned into account. The harbour has also been used recently for turbines, aggregates and wood imports. One last cruise ship is due in this year: Highland Council and Chamber assistance has been extremely useful with cruise ship business. However there needs to be further work undertaken to provide appropriate local offers for visitors.

S Mackie also noted that water infrastructure is as important as broadband and that Scottish Water should be included in discussions.

The Chairman drew the meeting to a close, highlighting the recurring theme of partnership working to achieve results.

Agreed Actions:

Ref:	Action:	Responsible Person:	Due Date:
1	Write to BT.	E Sinclair	Next meeting
2	Write to the Crown Estate.	E Sinclair	ASAP
3	Arrange press release after this (and future) meetings.	E Sinclair	ASAP
4	Forward comments on the importance of Wick Airport to Cllr G Ross.	All	ASAP
5	Find out timescales for Wick Airport business development study.	E Sinclair	08/09/12
6	Make Councillors aware of Wick HMRC timescales.	Cllr D Hendry	Next meeting