



Caithness & North Sutherland
REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP

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Issue 1- August 2008

Working together for a new future

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A message from Sir Anthony Cleaver, Chairman of the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership



It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of the regeneration partnership newsletter.

As the recently appointed chairman of the executive board, I am greatly impressed by the 'can-do' attitude of everyone I have had the pleasure to meet and work with.

A tremendous effort is being made by a variety of organisations, community groups and individuals to work, help and support the regeneration of this beautiful part of the country.

Of course, change brings uncertainty and a level of

frustration when the future isn't obvious. Let me re-assure you that a huge amount of work is already underway which will become the building blocks to secure a future for you, your children and your children's children.

The transition will not take place overnight but, while we need to act now to offset the impact of the rundown of the Dounreay site, time is still on our side.

The key to success is working together – everyone with a vested interest in the community – and that means everyone who works and lives here. To be successful, personal agendas must be set aside and we must all work together to sell the area.

You have a highly skilled workforce, the Pentland Firth on your doorstep, a way of life that is second to none and a great place to bring up your children in a safe environment, something which is sadly becoming more uncommon in this day and age.

We all need to start being confident about the future – that means we must all begin to talk about the future with confidence and we must not be afraid to shout about what we have to offer.

The Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership

Who are we? - What will we do? How will we do it?

Who are we?

The Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership was created in 2007 to lead a united effort to move our local economy away from its dependence on the nuclear industry.

The Partnership has 3 separate groupings - the **Executive Board**, the **Senior Officers' group** and the **Advisory Board**.

The **Executive Board** comprises the senior executives from the main partner agencies, and meets on a quarterly basis to oversee delivery of the strategy and action plan.

The **Senior Officers' Group** is responsible for ensuring the work is implemented. It has the responsibility to commit resources on behalf of its respective organisations and to be accountable for the implementation of agreed actions and projects within specific timescales. This team has more local representatives of the key partners and may also involve other key partners as required.

The **Advisory Board** represents a variety of local stakeholders' interests. It meets twice each year and will receive quarterly reports on progress. It will also offer feedback on behalf of local, regional and national interests.



Sir Anthony Cleaver
Independent Chairman



Greg Allan
Scottish Government



Sandy Cumming
HIE



Alistair Dodds
Highland Council



Randall Bargelt
NDA



“From North Highlands to the World – we're open for business.”

Chamber of Commerce can be a 'business voice' for Caithness

Work is underway to rejuvenate the Caithness Chamber of Commerce to ensure a single business voice in Caithness. It is hoped to bring all the individual groups together under the one banner of the Chamber.

An options study was commissioned, funded from DSRL/NDA and HIE. The study team has examined a range of topics including existing provision, services/ roles for a new Chamber, funding options, and best practice from other Chambers. A well-attended workshop in early June enabled some local businesses to voice support for this collective approach and it is hoped to have the blueprint for the new Chamber ready by September.

New offices will be the mainstay of Wick town centre

Highland Council has recently committed to proceeding with a major new office project in Wick.



Market Square, Wick

It is intended to provide new offices on the current Market Square site in the town centre which will also accommodate staff who currently occupy Rhind House and the Social Work Offices in High Street. The Council's enhanced presence in the town will benefit town centre businesses both directly through its staff and indirectly through the large number of callers who visit the offices every day. A project team is being set up, and the community will receive regular updates on progress.

Following immediately on from the £3million refurbishment of Drummuie at Golspie, which is now occupied by upwards of 100 staff, this new investment represents further confirmation of the Council's continuing commitment to Caithness and Sutherland.

Wick Enterprise centre opens its doors

New office premises have recently opened for the local base of Highland Opportunity Ltd, right in the heart of Pulteneytown at Miller Street in Wick where improvements to buildings have been taking place over the past few years

Highland Opportunity is a company wholly owned by Highland Council and this is another move to help in the regeneration of Wick. Advice on soft loans and other topics are available to all businesses in the area.



www.highland-opportunity.com/wick.html

Thurso Harbour facility



Following on the back of the successful international surfing championships work is in hand to regenerate the harbour area in Thurso.

Caithness Sports Facilities Ltd is working on a proposal for a new Thurso Harbour Centre which would provide a number of basic services including changing, washing, toilets and storage for individuals and groups which use Thurso bay and Thurso harbour area for various recreational and competition activities.

The centre would promote Thurso as a surfing and water sports arena and will improve the quality of a number of sports in the area and attract visitors and more competitions.

Planning permission is expected soon and the group is now in the process of looking for capital funders for the proposed £650K project.

Community planning essential for success

The Caithness Partnership is the organisation responsible for promoting and leading community planning activities in Caithness. The Partnership is made up of people who work in the public, private and voluntary sector in the county.

Directly relating to regeneration issues, the Caithness Partnership is involved in work including:

- support to the organisation for the proposed 2008 Caithness Conference.
- lobbying for better transport links to Caithness
- working with Rapsons to revamp the Caithness bus services. A public consultation will take place over the summer months.
- working with Caithness and Orkney representatives to improve conditions at Gills Bay to promote tourism.
- working with various Wick-centred organisations to deliver the Fairer Scotland fund which is targeted at getting people back to work.
- putting together a plan for LEADER funding in Caithness and supporting delivery of the fund locally
- working with the Dunnet & Cansbay Community council to help with a development plan, starting with transport issues
- The Environment Forum is working with ERI and others to scope a study for a Greenspace audit for Caithness. This is to ensure that publicly owned land is managed for biodiversity and public access. The forum is also considering issues relating to long-term timber supply in the area in relation to energy security.



Scrabster Developments Update



Based on earlier infrastructure development and the growing reputation of the port, Scrabster Harbour Trust unveiled an ambitious £20 million blueprint in September 2007 for further infrastructure development of the port. The blueprint had two strands: the modernisation of the old fish market pier and the creation of a new deepwater quay in the existing deep-water basin.

The developments will consolidate Scrabster as a significant hub of economic activity for Caithness and North Sutherland. In particular, the developments will enhance the port's ability to accommodate growth in oil and gas activity on the Atlantic Frontier and marine energy developments in the Pentland Firth.

An economic impact assessment study has been commissioned, with financial support from the NDA, to measure the current and potential contribution of the port to the area's economy.

The Trust has engaged with the energy sector and other agencies to ensure that the developments address current and future port users' needs. A feasibility study regarding the redevelopment of the Old Fish Market Pier is soon to be completed with part-finance from Highlands & Islands Enterprise. Subject to finalising the funding package and obtaining statutory consents, construction will take place in 2009.

In April 2008 the Trust completed the purchase of 30 acres of land close to the port. This greenfield site, within half a mile of the port, is zoned for industrial use. The purchase greatly enhances the Port's options for accommodating a wide range of activities.

www.scrabster.co.uk

Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd (DSRL)

The site closure programme at Dounreay is currently worth an estimated £80 million a year to the economy of Caithness and north Sutherland. This represents a significant proportion of the gross domestic product of the north Highlands. By 2025, when the decommissioning programme is all but complete the 2000+ people employed to work on the site by DSRL and the supply chain is likely to reduce to a handful of jobs.

DSRL and the NDA recognise they have a duty to manage the programme in a way that is sensitive to the local economy.

DSRL is leading initiatives on-site to help with the workforce transition to alternative employment, including career planning and business spin-out and by working with the NDA to support companies and agencies off-site to diversify the economic base of the area.

- Workforce transition: Plan-it is a voluntary, self-help development programme. It encompasses different training courses depending on people's needs and focuses on the personal goals and ambitions of each person and what they need to do to achieve them.

Home-shoring pilot could revolutionise contact centre industry

Workers at Thurso's BT contact centre are taking place in a trial that could change the face of their industry and lead to increased job opportunities for local people in the future.



BT's pilot Home-shoring project is now up and running with workers at BT's facility on Thurso Business Park testing equipment designed for home working. BT has selected 13 volunteers to trial the equipment at home. The trial utilises high-speed broadband links to allow the workers to carry out the same jobs they would do in a traditional contact centre.

If the trial is successful there are potential cost savings for operators such as BT, but also increased job creation opportunities in areas such as Caithness and North Sutherland, where BT is already aware of the skills of the workforce. The technology may remove barriers such as travelling to work, and would allow people with family or other commitments, that can still attend flexibly in line with customer demand, to find well-paid employment.

If the pilot, which is part-funded by HIE, is successful the technology could be introduced on a wider scale by BT.

www.btplc.com/news/articles

- Business spin-out: Services currently provided in-house by DSRL have potential to prosper beyond site closure as stand-alone businesses. Potential spin-outs identified so far include the environmental labs and training department, with work ongoing to develop business plans.
- Business start-ups: Highlands and Islands Enterprise has an office on the Dounreay site to give all staff access to services that include help and advice for starting a business.

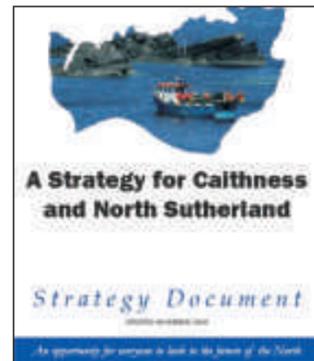


www.dounreay.com

Proposed view of Dounreay site in 2025

What will we do?

At the heart of the Regeneration Partnership is the **Caithness & North Sutherland Action Plan**. The Action Plan includes all of the activities needed to transform the local economy from one that is dependent on Dounreay to one that is not. The Plan is based on the Strategy for Caithness & North Sutherland that was produced, following public consultation, by the socio-economic working group chaired by John Thurso MP.



The first "snapshot" of the Action Plan was published in December 2007. Snapshot 3 has just been published, and we will tell you at least once every 3 months what progress is being made by publishing updated "snapshots" of the Plan.

How will we do it?

The Partnership does not directly employ staff. Instead key partners such as HIE, The Highland Council and the NDA recruit or second staff qualified to undertake the jobs required to deliver the **Caithness & North Sutherland Action Plan**.



Louise Smith is Project Manager for the Pentland Firth Tidal Energy Project. She is employed by HIE with joint funding from HIE and the NDA.



Duncan Mackay works for The Crown Estate on wave and tidal developments. Whilst Duncan's role is UK-wide, he is based here in Caithness.



Eann Sinclair is Programme Manager for CNSRP. He is working for The Highland Council, with funding from HIE and the NDA.



Eilidh Gunn is the Partnership's administrator, on secondment from The Highland Council.

Sandy Cumming, Chief Executive, HIE said "There are huge, world-class skills in Caithness and North Sutherland and lots of potential opportunities for the future. HIE has pledged an additional £12 million to help implement the regeneration plan."

For further information visit the website:
www.caithness.org/regeneration

First Minister Alex Salmond MSP to attend Caithness Conference 2008

Following the successful Caithness conference held in September 2007 a commitment has been given to repeat the event in 2008 – this time outlining the progress made over the past year.

Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond MSP has indicated he will attend. It will be held on Monday 29th September 2008 – more details will follow soon.



Delegates at the 2007 Caithness Conference





North Highland Regeneration Fund

The North Highland Regeneration Fund (NHRF) has been established to provide loan funding, complementing other existing sources of funding for small businesses. It provides pump-priming money to new ventures and existing organisations through low cost loan finance with the aim of turning ideas into reality and leading to job creation.

Set up in 2006 with an initial contribution of £500K, from NDA, eleven companies have benefited so far, with 57 jobs secured and with a further 64 new jobs projected to be created over the term of the existing loans.

In 2007 a further £1 million of funds, from NDA, was made available for investment in companies within the scope of the scheme rules.

www.nhrf.co.uk/index.html

National Nuclear Skills Academy, Scotland



The National Skills Academy for Nuclear is a unique network of employer-led centres of excellence for skills training, providing a means for hands-on involvement by employers in the design and delivery of learning, so that training is tailored to the specific needs of the nuclear industry.

Ken Nicol is the project manager for the Scottish arm of the Academy. Within Caithness, the Academy has been liaising with employers to understand their needs, to support work on both the Dounreay and

Vulcan sites but also in the long term to support the regeneration of the area. The current focus of work is to make training provided on the Dounreay site more accessible to employers in Caithness and to enhance/develop training facilities in Caithness to ensure that the appropriate skills are available for the nuclear and other energy sectors.

Jerry Abbott, Human Resource Manager at Dounreay, has been appointed as Chairman of the Scottish Steering Group for the Academy. A consortium of four Scottish colleges, led by North Highland College, has been selected by the Academy to develop and implement a range of higher national diplomas for Scotland's nuclear employees.

www.nuclear.nscademy.co.uk/index.html



Forss Business and Technology Park

A £6 million investment by New Park has seen the former US Navy base at Forss transformed into a business and technology park for the energy industry. It occupies the nine acre site of the former US Naval Communications base near Thurso, and is just a few miles from the Dounreay site.

New Park is one of the UK's leading private sector developers of Science and Technology Parks. Successfully harnessing property development experience and business management skills, the company promotes the growth of new technology by developing the dynamic environments in which innovative companies in the SME sector can prosper.

New Park has a unique blend of skills developed from practical experience of large scale property development and "hands on" commercialisation of science. New Park owns and manages its own Business & Technology Parks, forms creative partnerships with public sector organisations to develop incubation facilities and also offers managing agent services to other organisations.

The Forss site provides infrastructure crucial for technology development with tenants who are key players in the energy sector, such as UKAEA Ltd, NDA, Canberra, Entech, WEIR Group

Accommodation for technology incubator units and services for fledgling local businesses are available through the 'Innovation Forss' programme.

www.iforss.com

Dutch firm sets up in Wick

Tocado Tidal Energy Ltd is to build turbines at Wick harbour for its 10 megawatt prototype tidal energy plant. The company originally established an office base at the Forss business and technology park last year. Following completion of a successful feasibility study, funded by Pentland Alliance, it confirmed its plans to develop a long-term base in the area. Ten jobs are likely to be created at the Wick base by next year with production of the first tidal energy device expected to be in 2009. Tocardo managing director Hans van Breugel anticipates that employment could rise to 35-40 staff.



www.tocado.com/?News_%26amp%3B_info

The 'Saudi Arabia' of tidal power

The Pentland Firth could be the 'Saudi Arabia' of tidal power! This message was heard around the world in April 08 when, speaking in Washington DC during Tartan Week, Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond announced the £10M "Saltire Prize" for advances in clean energy in Scotland. The First Minister added that the Pentland Firth in particular had huge potential.

Caithness Energy Alliance had previously hosted a conference in Edinburgh in February 2008 to take forward the message that the area was ideally situated to become the centre of marine research, development, production and generation. The First Minister was the keynote speaker.



Following on from the conference a group representing the Caithness Energy Alliance and the Pentland Alliance (a consortium of UKAEA, CH2MHILL and AMEC) met again with the First Minister to discuss the advantages of the far north for marine energy.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/saltire-prize

Pentland Firth Tidal Energy Project

A project board has been set up comprising of representatives from Highland Council, NDA, HIE, Scottish Government and The Crown Estate.

Over 30 developers have visited the county so far this year, seeing for themselves the area's world-class engineering infrastructure and port capabilities. A series of studies of the Firth during 2008 will help refine the areas for future tidal power sites. The Crown Estate is hoping to announce the method for leasing out the seabed to developers by September this year, after which the race to develop and test devices in the Firth will start in earnest.



www.caithness.org/regeneration

National Nuclear archives to be based in Wick



The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) has announced that the UK's National Nuclear Archives will be built at Wick. The facility will house some 20-30 million digital records covering the history, development and decommissioning of the UK's civil nuclear industry since the 1940s.

The £17 million project will create around 20 specialist jobs and will also provide a new home for the Wick-based North Highland Archive. The NDA, HIE and The Highland Council worked together to produce the business case to bring the archives to Wick. The NDA has committed £8 million towards the cost of the building.

www.nda.gov.uk/news/boost-for-nuclear-archive.cfm

Marine Energy funding for research and development

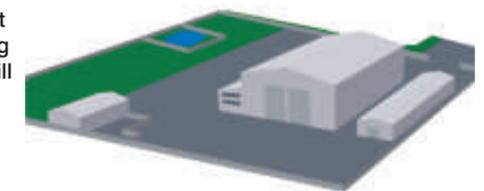
The University of the Highlands & Islands Millennium Institute, in collaboration with Heriot Watt University, has secured a £1million strategic development grant in support of marine energy research.

This will allow two new research posts to be made at the ERI in Thurso. The work will look at the potential environmental impacts of wave and tidal devices, and further understanding of the devices themselves.

www.erionline.co.uk/news.htm

Nicolson Engineering expansion to create new jobs

A major expansion at Nicolson Engineering Services in Bower will directly create between 40-60 new jobs over the next three years.



Nicolson Engineering Services Ltd. (NES) has been operating for over 25 years, and is considered one of the North of Scotland's leading Engineering and Fabrication Service Companies offering a comprehensive range of services from the smallest bespoke fabrications to large sub-sea support modules. NES has built its reputation on delivering a high quality service to a wide and varied client base primarily in the Nuclear, Petrochemical, Renewable Energy & Heavy Engineering sectors throughout the world, on and offshore. The new facility at Bower is expected to be open shortly.