

CAITHNESS & NORTH SUTHERLAND REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP

MINUTES OF ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD 2nd MARCH 2009, 11.00am AT T3UK, JANETSTOWN, THURSO

Present:

Cllr AS Park (Convener of THC – Chair)
Frances Gunn (NW Sutherland Federation of Community Councils)
William Manson (Association of Caithness Community Councils)
Cllr. David Flear (THC)
Cllr. Katrina Macnab (THC)
Rev. R. Johnstone (Dounreay Stakeholders' Group)
Peter Body (Caithness Chamber of Commerce)
Stephen Sutherland (Caithness Chamber of Commerce)
Trudy Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce)
Duncan Mackay (The Crown Estate)
Willie Watt (Wick Harbour Authority)
Ian Clark (Thurso & Wick Trades Council)

In Attendance:

Eann Sinclair (Programme Manager, CNSRP)
Iona Gunn (CNSRP – minutes)
Roy Kirk (Area Manager, HIE)
Stuart Black (Director of Planning & Development, THC)
Ian Hargrave (Corporate Manager, THC)

1 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed new members to the meeting.

2 Apologies for Absence

John Thurso MP, Jamie Stone MSP, George Bruce (Caithness Partnership), Rosemary Thompson (North Highland College), Simon Middlemas (Managing Director, DSRL), Fiona MacPherson (Inward Investment Manager), Louise Smith (HIE)

3 Previous Minutes

Approved as submitted.

4 Matters Arising

E. Sinclair reported that a paper on the respective roles and remits of the Partnership's 3 constituent groups had been circulated.

5 Caithness & north Sutherland Action Plan

6 Caithness & North Sutherland Action Plan

E. Sinclair described two papers before the members: the programme manager Update and the draft of Snapshot 6 of the Action Plan. He reported on progress with the Action Plan. It was felt that in general progress continued to be made, but the pace of delivery continued to cause some concern. W. Watt referred to several comments from potential developers of marine energy devices who felt that not enough progress was being made with the development of the Pentland Firth, both in terms of infrastructure (grid etc) and access to finance, and that this may influence them to seek other areas in the world. It was felt that THC's Planning service might have an influence on the development of both Scrabster and Wick harbours, and in particular upon use of transportation methods to move materials. W. Watt felt that manufacturers will dictate the types of transport used, and that efforts should be made to influence them. He cited Tesco being influenced to use sea transport for construction materials. S. Black agreed to raise this within the Planning service as an issue. **ACTION S. Black**

E. Sinclair described how he had highlighted changes to the individual items in the plan since December's meeting, and also highlighted potential changes in priority on issues such as access to finance in the light of the current economic climate. It was generally agreed that more needed to be done to raise awareness of the routes to finance. T. Morris spoke of the Chamber of Commerce's plans to bring banking representatives north to discuss finance issues (**ACTION: T. Morris**), and R. Kirk described HIE's ongoing programme of measures to help businesses. It was also agreed that with the imminent transfer of responsibilities from HIE to The Highland Council that more should be done to ensure that businesses were aware of the detail of these arrangements (**ACTION: R. Kirk, S. Black**).

The Chairman then proposed that the meeting look at each of the current actions in the Plan and discuss both progress and any issues requiring further action. The main items discussed were as follows:

Scrabster Harbour: Scrabster Harbour Trust is currently working on its detailed plans for the phased development of the Harbour. It is also currently recruiting a replacement for Sandy Mackie. The 3 actions currently in the Plan are not yet detailed enough. ES agreed to liaise with SHT to develop detailed workstreams. **ACTION: E. SINCLAIR**

Wick Harbour: W. Watt reported that the Wick marina was expected to be open for this year's HarbourFest which is being held on 26-28 June. However, W. Watt was also keen to highlight that Wick harbour also expected to play a role in the marine renewables industry. To enable the harbour to develop its capacity in this respect it is vital that the structural condition of the south River Pier is addressed. D. Flear highlighted the urgency of this, and wondered if pressure could be brought to bear to include it in THC's Capital Plan. ES agreed to follow this issue up with Neil Gillies of the Council's TEC services team. **ACTION: E. SINCLAIR**

A further expected phase of development at the Harbour will be onshore waterfront developments. R. Kirk acknowledged that current financial climate was not favourable for inward leisure investment, but agreed that the development of a

physical masterplan for the area should be a priority once this year's HarbourFest was completed. **ACTION: R. Kirk**

Pentland Firth: D. Mackay updated on recent developments, focusing on the real progress made over the past 12 months. The Crown Estate's announcement that 38 companies/ consortia had reached the current stage of tendering in the sea-bed leasing process was indicative of the global interest in the area. Lease agreements will be signed by late summer. He agreed that the development of onshore infrastructure and access to capital were the key drivers for the next few months. He felt that the urgency of the need to tackle the issue of Grid connections was now accepted at both Holyrood and Westminster, and was also being influenced by the need to find grid solutions for Round 3 of Offshore Wind leases. However, a key issue for transmission companies such as Scottish & Southern has been legislative blocks preventing infrastructure work being carried out in advance of demand. This was beginning to change, but continuing influence was required to push it forward. W. Watt questioned whether more local control of the Dounreay-Beaully power line could be brought back under more localised control. D. Mackay said it was unclear what would happen. R Kirk said that HIE was about to publish a grid study identifying some actions that could be undertaken. S. Black pointed to a recent Highland Council meeting at which Scottish & Southern had made a presentation on Grid issues, available on the council's website at

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/committees/strategiccommittees/planningenvironmentanddevelopmentcommittee/2009-01-21-ped-min.htm>

It was strongly felt that these were issues that should be flagged up to the Executive Board. **ACTION E. SINCLAIR** to raise at Executive Board meeting on 17th March.

I. Hargrave spoke of the impending changes to the Pentland Firth project structure. HIE will take the lead on the project, and will maintain a groups of stakeholders. R. Kirk said that a revised work programme would be available soon. **ACTION: R. KIRK** to circulate programme when available.

The potential effects of other Highland fabrication yards such as Arnish, Nigg etc on the local area was also discussed. It was agreed that whilst there was room for complementary working, local sites needed to position themselves as key to the development of tidal in particular.

Caithness Engineering: E. Sinclair reported that he continued to work with a small group of local and regional representatives to discuss enhanced skills provision for engineering. HIE was currently carrying out a piece of work to establish engineering and science provision in primary 6/7 and S1/2 in high schools in the area. R. Kirk also highlighted ongoing work with local engineering companies via growth plans. A meeting of this group is planned for late March and E. Sinclair will circulate actions from the group as they are agreed. **ACTION: E.SINCLAIR**

Chamber of Commerce: T. Morris outlined her early work to generate new members. Providing an umbrella for presence at All Energy in Aberdeen, taking a lead on town centre regeneration were discussed.

Dounreay "spin-outs": E. Sinclair updated on general progress with the process of identifying and working with site-based units seen to have business potential. Current indications are that around 80 jobs could be involved in this. It was agreed that it

would be useful to have a fuller update on this at the next meeting. **ACTION: DSRL** to update.

Transport: The outcome of the Strategic Transport Projects Review was disappointing for the north, with only one mention of potential work north of Inverness: safety-based improvements on the A9. However, discussions continue over the feasibility of a low-level road solution at Berriedale. A full feasibility study would be the next step for this, and it was understood that this was with Ministers at present. E. Sinclair said that the Caithness Transport Forum had met the previous week and identified Berriedale as a key priority project. He also pointed to plans for bus transport enhancements by Stagecoach on both their Caithness-Inverness service and the local Caithness services.

Access to capital: It was agreed that this should be a priority in the current climate. NHRF remains a key provider of loan finance. It was agreed that access to information on other sources of support was important to capture. The launch of the Business Gateway in April was agreed as a key action. **ACTION: E. SINCLAIR TO DRAFT ACTIONS.**

National Nuclear Archive: E. Sinclair updated members. Responsibility for the project had now come back to the NDA Forss team, who have asked DSRL to take the project forward. A scoping exercise is currently being carried out, and details should be known by June. The project's completion date has, however, slipped. DSRL has agreed to provide regular updates on progress from now on. **ACTION: DSRL**

7 Inward Investment update

R. Kirk gave an update on the range of cases currently being pursued by F. MacPherson. He spoke about the encouraging progress being made within the energy sector (discussed earlier in the meeting). There are specific discussions taking place on ideas such as the "blue data centre" which can use power generated from the Firth even before Grid issues are resolved. Also plans to create a post to market the area's engineering skills nationally and internationally via an engineering consortium. This would help further enhance the area's inward investment "portfolio" for companies being targeted for relocation to the area.

9 Any Other Business

R. Johnstone said that the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was coming to Caithness in October 2009. He wondered if a programme of events could be suggested to highlight the work going on in the area. **ACTION: E. SINCLAIR** to draft ideas for programme and liaise with R. Johnstone.

D. Flear spoke of the excellent film in Caithness Horizons that promotes the whole county of Caithness. He felt it would be useful as a stand-alone DVD to help promote the area at events. R. Kirk offered to investigate this with P. Cariss at Caithness Horizons. **ACTION: R. KIRK**

W. Manson spoke about issues relating to the provision of apprentice places in the area. It was felt that with DSRL's apprenticeship scheme closing in a few years there would be increasing pressures to find solutions. There was a feeling that whilst a new engineering centre at North Highland College was planned there was still an issue about the classroom/ workplace balance for apprentices. W. Watt spoke of the previous joint scheme developed by local engineering companies, and suggested it would still work well, and would be more in tune with the needs of companies.

F. Gunn highlighted the Sutherland Summit planned for April. Scottish Government ministers Jim Mather and Roseanna Cunningham will attend, and it will be a chance to raise awareness of issues affecting Sutherland. She extended an invitation to members. **ACTION: F.GUNN** to forward details to E. Sinclair for circulation.

E. Sinclair highlighted plans to change the direction of the Caithness Partnership, towards project delivery at community level. G. Bruce had asked for the views of the members on this issue, in advance of applying for LEADER funding for the proposal. E. Sinclair felt that it did not duplicate any aspect of the Regeneration Partnership's work, and D. Flear confirmed that it had been supported by Caithness Councillors.

The role of the press at meetings such as this was briefly discussed. There was a general view that without press attendance much more was discussed than would otherwise have been. E. Sinclair agreed to raise at Exec Board and speak to I. Grant. **ACTION E. SINCLAIR**

10 Date of Next meeting

1st June 2009, Caithness Horizons, Thurso.

Actions List

Action	Due Date	Responsible Person
Raise issue of alternative transport methods for materials for marine industry with THC Planning service	Asap	S. Black
Bring banking representatives north to discuss finance issues	Asap	T. Morris
Disseminate information on Business Gateway launch	By 27 th March 09	R. Kirk/ S. Black
Liaise with Scrabster HT to develop detailed workstreams	Asap	E. Sinclair
Raise issue of structural condition of the Wick	By 27 th March	E. Sinclair

south River Pier with THC		
Commission Physical masterplan for Wick Harbour area	By Aug 09	R. Kirk
Raise issues relating to development of the pentland Firth tidal industry with Executive Board	At 17 th march meeting	E. Sinclair
Circulate revised Pentland Firth workplan	Asap	R. Kirk
Circulate actions list from engineering skills group	By 17 th April	E. Sinclair
Update on progress with DSRL business units	At next meeting	DSRL
Provide updated actions on access to capital for businesses	Asap	E. Sinclair
Provide information on revised workplan for National Nuclear Archive	By June 09	S. Middlemas
Liaise with R. Johnstone on arrangements for Moderator's visit	By June 09	E. Sinclair
Secure use of Caithness Horizons film for promotional purposes	Asap	R. Kirk
Provide details of Sutherland Summit in April 09 to E. Sinclair for circulation to members	Asap	F. Gunn
Raise press attendance at AB meetings with Exec Board and with I. Grant	On 17 th March and asap thereafter	E. Sinclair