



## **Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership**

### **Advisory Board meeting**

**T3UK, Janetstown, Thurso 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

#### **Present:**

Cllr Sandy Park (Chair); Eann Sinclair (CNSRP – minutes); Duncan Mackay (The Crown Estate); Fiona Macpherson (HIE); Roy Kirk (HIE); Cllr Ian Ross (THC); Cllr Katrina Macnab (THC); Anna MacConnell (NDA); Derrick Milnes (T&WTC); Louise Smith (HIE); Frances Gunn (FNWCC); William Manson (ACCC); Trudy Morris (CCoC); Neil Robertson (CCoC); Stephen Sutherland (CCoC); Michael Dunnett (DSRL)

#### **1 Apologies:**

Stuart Black, Cllr. David Flear, Ian Hargrave, Simon Middlemas, Ian Clark

#### **2 Pentland Firth update – Duncan Mackay, The Crown Estate**

D. Mackay updated members on the announcement on 16<sup>th</sup> March of the provisional lease-holders in Round 1 of the Pentland Firth & Orkney Waters. Ten sites had been leased, offering 600MW each. Four sites are tidal, and six are wave. One bidder withdrew from the process at a late stage, and this was for a lease in the Inner Sound (between Stroma and Caithness).

N Robertson asked what the plans would be for the Inner Sound. D Mackay said that plans would be announced by the end of March for a “mini-round” that would be open to the entire market. This process might take several further months.

Cllr I Ross said that the Highland Council’s Planning Environment & Development (PED) Committee had received a very positive presentation from Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Ltd regarding planned grid infrastructure enhancements in the north.

A MacConnell asked about opportunities for local supply chain companies, since many of the Round 1 sites are on the Orkney side of the Pentland Firth, and most work is focused around EMEC. R Kirk suggested it would be useful to arrange a visit to EMEC and some of the test sites in Orkney, to better understand current activities, and opportunities for local companies. This was generally agreed. **ACTION 1 – Roy Kirk** to investigate dates.

### 3 Previous Minutes

These were agreed as presented.

### 4 Matters Arising

National Nuclear Archive: it was agreed to wait for a response to the letter from DSG to the NDA Chief executive before deciding on further action.

Public sector procurement issues: T Morris reported on changes within Highland Council procedures, and was awaiting feedback.

Melness Community Windpower: F Gunn reported that the issue with the connection offer from SSE remained. Cllr I Ross said this was potentially an issue for all community projects of this type. He suggested that Highland Council and HIE should be able to help. R Kirk agreed. **ACTION 2 – R Kirk and S Black.**

### 5 Programme Manager Update

E Sinclair gave a presentation on progress with the Regeneration programme. He said that a draft programme had now been produced for comment, and highlighted key thematic areas such as Energy, Engineering/ Decommissioning, Enterprise/ Innovation, Tourism/ Food & Drink, Connectivity.

The draft programme identified key activities aimed at achieving some 1,900 employment opportunities over the next ten years. Of remaining concern within the draft programme was marine energy, with a lack of detail on the activities required to capture local economic benefit. The independent analysis commissioned by HIE of the potential employment value of wave and tidal energy in the Pentland Firth area pointed to over 800 FTE jobs being achievable. E Sinclair believed that over 600 of those could be attributed to the Caithness/ north Sutherland area. E Sinclair planned to outline this vision to Executive Board members on 9<sup>th</sup> April, and to continue putting in place action teams to help accelerate delivery where required.

T Morris asked how aspirational the employment estimates were. E Sinclair replied that whilst the projected figures were aspirational, it was important to aim for employment numbers that would support a genuine economic transition. S Sutherland felt that the job projections needed to represent both new jobs and the diversification/ securing of jobs in the existing supply chain. It was agreed that this should be more explicit in any description of the regeneration programme.

Cllr K Macnab highlighted the importance of apprenticeships to the future economy of the area. E Sinclair agreed, and highlighted the ongoing work on apprenticeships that was being led by staff from T3UK following the partnership-led skills event in February. He agreed to update members on progress at the next meeting. **ACTION 3 - E Sinclair.**

R Johnstone highlighted the ongoing lack of profile for the area. This leads to problems in recruiting staff in key sectors such as health and education to the area. M Dunnett agreed that this was a general problem. He said that DSRL's approach was to highlight employment opportunities at Dounreay at appropriate times of year (eg

holiday periods). F MacPherson said that she was actively working on marketing materials in key sectors.

R Kirk asked if socio-economics would be contractualised in the PBO competition, as discussed at the DSG meeting. E Sinclair said that John Thurso had discussed this issue with the Chief Executive of the NDA. The DSG was to write to the Chief Executive of the NDA to ask about the NDA's intended approach to this. ES agreed to work with DSG to raise the question.

A MacConnell suggested that the community needed to communicate its views direct to the bidders as they became known. R Kirk agreed, and suggested that an event be organised to allow this to happen. ES agreed to investigate this in conjunction with DSG. **ACTION 4 - E Sinclair**

## **6 Member Updates**

Highland Council: Cllr I Ross said that the Highland Council was discussing a coordinated young people/ employment initiative with Skills Development Scotland, and said that Business Gateway (delivered through Highland Opportunity) now had a new Operating Plan. The Highland-wide Local Development Plan was due to be published in May, with a new Caithness and Sutherland plan due in two years' time. Cllr K Macnab highlighted ongoing difficulties in accessing LEADER funds. I Ross agreed to look again at resource issues **ACTION 5 – Cllr I Ross.**

HIE: R Kirk highlighted recent successes for ABSL Power Systems and Mowat Technical design Services. He also said that Caithness Chamber of Commerce would be running an event on HIE's behalf the following week for its account-managed businesses. He also said that HIE had just announced its Severance programme, and that two staff with particular Caithness/ north Sutherland remits would be leaving. He thanked both Fiona MacPherson and Louise Smith for their work on behalf of the area. The Chairman agreed, and wished the Board's thanks to be recorded.

Federation of N Coast CC: F Gunn said she looked forward to progress with the STEM initiative in local schools. She also highlighted the match funding issue highlighted previously in connection with LEADER funding.

Assoc of Caithness CC: W. Manson said that recent bad weather had highlighted inadequacies in the area's roads infrastructure, and was an ongoing source of concern for Community Councils, due to the wider impacts on sectors such as health.

DSRL: M Dunnett said DSRL was currently working through scenarios on how to move forward within its budget settlement. He said that impacts were already being felt in both DSRL and the supply chain.

Trades Council: D Milnes highlighted the Trades Council's ongoing lobbying programme, which had seen a local presence at all the key party conferences. The Council had worked closely with CNSRP Programme Manager to ensure a consistent message was delivered on the area's issues.

Chamber of Commerce: S Sutherland highlighted the companies that had come together to form Caithness Engineering. Whilst an early tender opportunity had been unsuccessful he believed that this collaborative approach was important for the area's future success in bidding for larger contracts. N Robertson highlighted that some technology companies might be falling between Business Gateway and HIE's Account Management system. He said that the Chamber was working with BG and HIE to address this. T Morris said that the Chamber was developing its Business Plan,

and that its structure would reflect the priorities in the *Vision for Caithness & north Sutherland*. She said that with Fiona MacPherson leaving the Chamber was keen to work with HIE to maintain momentum on Inward Investment.

NDA: A MacConnell highlighted £3M of funding applications going to the NDA's socio-economic Fund. She suggested that lack of match funding from other funders was one reason for this trend. She also felt that a more joined-up approach to socio-economic funding was important.

E Sinclair  
CNSRP

<b>Ref:</b>	<b>Action:</b>	<b>Due Date:</b>	<b>Responsible Person:</b>
1	Arrange visit to renewables interests in Orkney	Next Meeting	R Kirk
2	Support ongoing grid connection issues at Melness	Next meeting	R Kirk/ S Black
3	Update on apprenticeship issues	Next meeting	E Sinclair
4	Investigate meeting with PBO bidders in conjunction with DSG	Next meeting	E Sinclair
5	Investigate resource issues with LEADER funding/ applications	Next meeting	Cllr I Ross