

Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Advisory Board meeting, 7th September 09
T3UK, Janetstown

Present

Cllr Sandy Park (Chairman); Donna Chisholm (HIE, Item 2 only); Frances Gunn (Federation of North Coast Community Councils); Ken Nicol (DSRL); William Manson (Association of Caithness Community Councils); Derek Milnes (Thurso & Wick Trades Council); Peter Body (Caithness Chamber of Commerce); Trudy Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce); Neil Robertson (Caithness Chamber of Commerce); Rev Ronnie Johnstone (DSG); Cllr George Farlow; Stuart Black (THC); Roy Kirk (HIE); Cllr David Flear; Eann Sinclair (CNSRP)

1 Welcome & Apologies

Ian Clark (Thurso & Wick Trades Council); Simon Middlemas (DSRL); Ian Hargrave (THC); Willie Watt (Subsea 7); Duncan Mackay (The Crown Estate); George Junor (SDS)

2 Presentation on STEM project for local schools

Donna Chisholm, STEM Director in HIE, gave a presentation on a proposed pilot project in local primary and secondary schools to enhance the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering and maths subject areas. The presentation can be downloaded from

Responding to comments and questions after the presentation Donna agreed that the work was tied into the Skills Audit currently being carried out for the Partnership by HIE. R. Johnstone welcomed the proposal, but highlighted the positive aspects to local people going elsewhere to study at FE level.

D. Chisholm categorised four distinct groups of young people considering university level education: “enthusiastic leavers”, “reluctant leavers”, “reluctant stayers” and “enthusiastic stayers”. It was agreed that there was a need to work with the young people to broaden their knowledge of local opportunities for education and work, to help minimise the numbers leaving for educational and employment reasons, and to give those already left more attractive reasons to return.

R Thompson agreed – many who have done a PhD at N Highland College/ ERI would like to stay in the area when they finish their qualification. Recently one PhD was offered a job for £70,000 when he finished his doctorate, but he had to leave the area for this.

It was agreed that the Advisory Board should support this proposal, and the Chairman suggested that a letter be sent from the Advisory Board to the NDA supporting the application for NDA funding, which if approved would form the final piece of funding necessary to commence the project. **ACTION 1 – E. Sinclair**

Stuart Black also offered to check on the current position with the Fairer Scotland fund. **ACTION 2 – S. Black**

3 Minutes of previous meeting

Trudy Morris & Stephen Sutherland had been missed off the list of attendees. The final minute would address this. **ACTION 3 – I. Gunn.** The minute was otherwise agreed as a true record of the meeting.

4 Matters arising

R Johnstone asked if reasons had been given for neither Thurso or Wick being awarded funds from the Town Centre Regeneration Fund? S Black replied that there were bids for over £100 million, it was very over subscribed. However, Highland Council has submitted new bids for both towns into the 2nd round of the Fund. Results of this should be known during September.

E Sinclair reported that after the last Advisory Board in June he had raised with the Executive Board the issues of additional resource for both Communications and Programming. The Partnership has been offered a short-term resource for Programming from UKAEA, and E Sinclair will be working with this person over the coming weeks to produce a fuller version of the Programme plan. The Executive Board also agreed on a brief for a communications resource, and this will go out to tender after this week's Executive Board meeting.

5 Updates from members:

Cllr D Flear asked about the National Nuclear Archive, having seen it in the Action Plan. Attracting the project to Caithness was a collective effort from Council, HIE, DSG and others. However, since then there seemed to have been less and less local involvement. Cllr Flear had heard that a project board had been brought together but there was no Highland Councillor on it.

E Sinclair said that the NNA project was now back under local NDA responsibility, and DSRL had been tasked with scoping the project. A Project Manager has been employed by DSRL, and the scoping work should be completed by December. Ken Nicol agreed to take Cllr Flear's views back to DSRL. **ACTION 4 – K. Nicol.**

It was also suggested that the Project Manager might be able to present his scoping results to the Advisory Board meeting on 27th November. **ACTION 5 – K. Nicol** to discuss with PM.

Assoc of Caithness Community Councils: W Manson said that Louise Smith is to present on Pentland Firth progress at the next Association meeting. He agreed to give feedback to AB members. **ACTION 6 – W Manson**

Caithness Chamber of Commerce: T Morris said that CCoC now had a new Board and introduced Neil Robertson as its new Chair. She thanked outgoing Chair Peter

Body for the work in getting the Chamber to this point. A new member of Staff started, allowing Trudy to focus on the strategic development of the Chamber. The Chamber has 82 members – well on target to achieve 120 by the end of the year. A first newsletter was published in the Executive magazine. A number of events have also been held, and efforts are being made to secure space at All-Energy in Aberdeen next year.

T Morris went on to say that some members are concerned about renewables. There is concern about how recent announcements at Nigg and EMEC will affect Caithness. Businesses need to know that Nigg & Orkney won't take away from Caithness, and are looking for assurances that Caithness won't lose out.

Members are also having a problem with the Councils procurement policies – there is a feeling that it may be working against small businesses, both in terms of being aware of opportunities to tender, and in managing the pre-qualification process. She stressed that this was not just a local issue, and had been taken up by the Chambers of Commerce nationally. S Black agreed to take this back to Council colleagues.

ACTION 7 – S Black

Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd/ National Skills Academy - Nuclear: K Nicol said DSRL is about to publish its socio-economic plan. Of the potential spin-out businesses mentioned in the plan the furthest advanced is the Analytical Laboratory. However, DSRL feels it requires additional entrepreneurial experience and is discussing possible with HIE some possible means of assistance. Through the NSA-N the area continues to have a number of students applying for bursaries.

Dounreay Stakeholders' Group: R Johnstone – the stakeholder group has had a major triumph thanks to Derek Milnes' work on the NDA's proposed Industry Day to commence the PBO competition for Dounreay. Those prospective bidders attending an industry day Edinburgh will now be required to attend a stakeholders' day in Caithness.

There is also a general concern about future budget settlements, and what impact this might have on NDA budgets for decommissioning.

North Highland College/ UHIMI: R Thompson highlighted two main areas of concern at present. Firstly the college is capped on its student numbers: last year it was 11.6% over this limit and this year it is 30% over the limit, with some 12,000 students now enrolled within NHC. There is particular pressure on everything related to engineering, fabrications and welding. The College is therefore trying to convince the Scottish Government to extend its additional funding for apprentices, as the funding announced seemed to have focused on the central belt rather than the Highlands & Islands. She felt that a letter of support from the Advisory Board might be helpful. R Thompson agreed to provide further details so a letter could be drafted. **ACTION 8 - R Thompson.**

A parallel issue is the pressure on the staffing bill as the College expands. If NHC could pilot the worker trainer sooner rather than later that would be helpful.

Engineering Skills Centre will be operational for 2011, and the opening of the Centre for Energy & Environment will double the ERI's numbers. R Thompson reported that there had been a good response to the advertisement of the Principals job, and there will be an appropriate handover period.

The Chairman thanked Rosemary for her contribution to the development of the College.

HIE: R Kirk said that the HIE board had held its recent meeting in Wick - the first time in 2 years the Board has met outside Inverness. He referred to the meeting earlier in the morning with Lord Hunt, the UK Energy Minister. The meeting had been organised by John Thurso MP, and R Kirk felt those present had put forward a very strong case for the area's energy aspirations. Cllr Flear and E Sinclair had also attended, and they agreed that it had been a worthwhile meeting.

The Chairman noted that HIE Chief Executive Sandy Cumming had been unwell and remained off work. He asked members if they felt it would be appropriate to send the Board's best wishes. It was agreed that a note be sent to Sandy Cumming wishing him well. **ACTION 9 – E Sinclair**

CVS North: F Gunn said that CVS North had recently had its AGM, at which E Sinclair had been the guest speaker. She also said that she had spoken to some local teachers who are keen to see the STEM project move ahead, although they did have some concerns about the result being an increased workload. F Gunn also raised continuing concerns about Broadband availability on the north coast. E Sinclair had spoken to HIE who were still working with Scottish Government and BT to agree timetables for the digitisation of exchanges to full ADSL. An announcement was expected by the end of September.

Cllr G Farlow: Cllr Farlow welcomed the chance to attend AB meetings. He echoed F Gunn's broadband concerns.

S Black said that consultations are starting for the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. The first was in Wick last week and the next is in Thurso. The consultation period is 12 weeks with a blog on the Highland Council website (at www.hwldp.blogspot.com). Consultation is also taking place on the Highland Coastal Development Strategy. Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council, HIE and the Crown Estate had a productive meeting last week looking at community benefit from marine energy.

6 Caithness & north Sutherland Action Plan

E Sinclair said that comments on the Action Plan from the last AB meeting were taken to the Executive Board meeting. The front of the document has been changed and is now the update report. However ES remained concerned with the element of the plan that related to the Pentland Firth. It is currently too vague in terms of deliverable actions and timescales. He is speaking to partners to find a way of clarifying it. Following the discussion around the points raised earlier by the Chamber of Commerce he agreed to raise this again at the Executive Board meeting on Thursday 10th September. **ACTION 10 – E Sinclair**

T Morris asked if the Crown Estate would be announcing the successful companies at the Caithness Conference? ES felt that there would be an announcement regarding the number of leases being awarded, but it was unlikely that the names of the companies would be revealed until all contractual negotiations had finished.

R Thompson asked if we knew what the Crown Estate's assessment criteria were. ES said this is not known yet as it is part of the competition process.

S Black felt it would be useful to have a regular update on the agenda for the Pentland Firth project. ES said that R Kirk had a proposal to put to Board on that topic. R Kirk agreed that the Pentland Firth project was at a stage where more local advice and support would be very useful. He therefore proposed that the AB consider becoming the local Advisory Board for the Pentland Firth project. He felt that this might have the advantage of increasing local input to the project, as well as allowing the partners to communicate progress more effectively on a local level. ES felt that another advantage was that it would not involve setting up another group

R Johnstone said he was not opposed in principle to the idea, but felt it would be useful to take away the idea for consideration. Cllr Fear asked if R Kirk would prepare a short paper on this. R Kirk Agreed to circulate a paper to members.

ACTION 11 – R Kirk.

7 Inward Investment Update

F Macpherson said that although the names of the remaining Pentland Firth developers were not officially known yet she continued working with a number of developers, and has invited some to come up and meet the local supply chain. Work continues with Atlantis Resources on their proposals to set up in the area. P Body said he had read that Atlantis could have a site on Hoy. Neither F Macpherson or R Kirk were aware of this story. Updated information on available office space in the area is currently being prepared. F Macpherson will be part of an SDI stand at the Tidal Today conference in London in November.

Contact has been made with an Aberdeen IT company looking to open an office in Caithness. This would have an initial 3 jobs attached.

A tourism accommodation study is being carried out, looking at the potential for (and impact of) budget chain hotel presence in Caithness.

8 Any Other Business:

ES mentioned the Caithness Regeneration Conference on the 1st of October. The final meeting of the Caithness Conference steering heard that there would be over 120 confirmed attendees. There will also be an exhibition area with around 14 different stand spaces. Jim Murphy MP has been confirmed as keynote speaker. Now waiting to hear if a senior Scottish Government Minister will be able to attend.

9 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting on Friday the 27th November will start at 11.00am (venue to be confirmed).

Actions List:

Ref	Action	Due Date	Responsible Person
1	Draft letter of support to NDA		E. Sinclair
2	Check on position on fairer Scotland fund	18 September 09	S. Black
3	Update previous minutes	18 September 09	I. Gunn
4	Take views on NNA back to DSRL	18 September 09	K. Nicol
5	Discuss NNA presentation at next AB meeting	27 November 09	K. Nicol
6	Association of Caithness Community Councils feedback	27 November 09	W. Manson
7	View of Procurement to be taken back to the council	18 September 09	S. Black
8	Provide further details for letter of support	25 September 09	R. Thompson
9	Note to Sandy Cumming	18 September 09	E. Sinclair
10	Raise issues with Pentland Firth in Action plan with the Executive Board	10 September 09	E. Sinclair
11	Circulate papers on becoming the Advisory Board for the Pentland Firth project	06 November 09	R. Kirk