

CAITHNESS & NORTH SUTHERLAND REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP

PARTNER UPDATES

April 2009

This update paper incorporates reports from a range of partners involved in delivering elements of the *Caithness & north Sutherland Action Plan*. It is hoped that by condensing multiple reports into one paper the information will be disseminated more efficiently amongst the various groups such as the CNSRP Advisory Board, Executive Board and the Dounreay Stakeholders' Group. It also confirms the amount of joint work going on between partners such as DSRL, HIE, NDA, THC.

Caithness & North Sutherland Action Plan

Snapshot 6 of the Action Plan was published in late March following agreement from the Advisory and Executive Boards of the Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership. Detailed workstreams for high priority projects are now being finalised, and should be published during April.

The NDA has appointed Anna MacConnell to the post of Socio-Economic Manager. Anna began work in her new role on 23rd March. She will be based at the NDA Forss office. HIE has begun recruitment for a Tourism Manager and an Infrastructure Manager to help deliver projects within the Action Plan. It is hoped that the two people will be in post by July/ August.

Progress with High Priority activities

Scrabster Harbour

Scrabster Harbour Trust is working on its plan for Phase 1 of the proposed redevelopment and expansion of the harbour, and is discussing with stakeholders its strategy for financing the programme of work. It is also in discussions with potential inward investors. Following the departure of Sandy Mackie, the Trust's Manager, to work for the NDA the Trust has recruited a new Manager to maintain the port's progress.

Wick Harbour

The funding package to deliver the Wick Marina has been agreed, following detailed discussions between Wick Harbour Authority, HIE, the NDA and The Crown Estate for both loan and grant elements. The Harbour Authority hopes that the marina can be opened in time for this year's HarbourFest. Discussions

on the potential for waterfront developments to complement the marina facility can now take place between the Harbour Authority and local agencies.

Pentland Firth Project

There is a strong demand from developers wishing to locate their tidal devices in the Pentland Firth. The Crown Estate received applications from thirty eight companies that expressed an interest in obtaining a seabed lease in the area. These organisations have until 15th of May to submit their proposals. Following an evaluation process the first sea bed lease documentation is expected to be signed in the third quarter of this year. Subject to obtaining other statutory consents it is envisaged that the first devices could be deployed in 2011. In the meantime talks have started aimed at providing a solution to the current grid constraints. TCE has significantly increased its staff size in the renewables section (from 24 to 60) to cope with the increasing demands. HIE continues to have discussions with individual developers regarding onshore activities such as manufacturing, assembly and operation/ maintenance facilities. It will be vital to attract these to our area if the emerging tidal industry is to have a positive effect on the local economy.

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The structure of the Pentland Firth Project is changing to reflect the rapidly-increasing pace of the tidal energy sector. Eight separate workstreams have been identified, and these are split between The Crown Estate and HIE. They are as follows:

- Offshore Planning and Consents (TCE)
- Research & Development (HIE)
- Health & Safety (HIE)
- Stakeholder Engagement & Communications (TCE)
- Supply Chain (HIE)
- Project Management, Planning & Budget (HIE)
- Developers' Forum (TCE)

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Engineering

NDA continues to work with North Highland College staff on the proposed engineering facility at the College. Peter Poulton is being employed by North Highland College to assist them with the Project. Partial funding (approximately 50%) has been secured from a number of bodies for the facility. Submissions for the remaining funding are being made. As part of this funding process, an application for Outline Planning Permission has been made to the Highland Council. A second project users' forum is scheduled for 20 April 2009.

Deleted: Peter Poulton, DSRL, is assisting North Highland College with its plans. College staff have visited other engineering training establishments to look at best practice. A first meeting of the project's users' forum took place on 23rd January to engage with local engineering businesses to ensure that the facility is fit for purpose.

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CNSRP has brought together a group of representatives to discuss future skills provision in the sector. Current workstreams include a potential pilot project in local primary and secondary schools to enhance teaching of science/ engineering. A presentation on worker/ trainers was also brought to the area by national Trade Union organisers, with a view to investigating the potential of this

for local implementation. A further meeting of the CNSRP engineering group takes place on 23rd April.

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NDA/ DSRL and HIE support continues to be given to the National Skills Academy for Nuclear in Scotland. The Nuclear Apprentice of the year (Scottish Region) has been announced, and the winner is from Caithness (Rolls Royce). The winner of the Foundation Degree/HND Award and the Leadership in Skills Award are also from Caithness (DSRL).

John O' Groats Tourism

HIE has commissioned a company to work on the development of a physical masterplan at John O' Groats. The work should be complete this summer.

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Inward Investment

HIE's Inward Investment Manager has been working mainly on leads within the energy and tourism sectors, but has also been following up several leads from potential investors in the services sector. She is working with colleagues in HIE and SDI on a proposition document and marketing materials for tourism.

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A joint North of Scotland Industries Group/HIE event was held on March 10th and 11th (Caithness on the 10th and Orkney on the 11th). Some 40 companies took part over the two days, including 17 marine device developers from 10 companies and 17 local companies with potential to derive work from this emerging industry. The Crown Estate and HIE held a joint developers' workshop day on April 8th, bringing representatives from each of the companies still bidding for seabed leases together to discuss common issues.

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The area also had a stand at the Scottish Renewables Forum's annual conference in Edinburgh on March 18th and 19th, where significant public progress was seen to be made on infrastructural issues such as the upgrading of the National Grid. HIE will have a shared stand with Orkney's EMEC at an energy conference in Bath at the end of April, during which staff have arranged meetings with developers. There will also be a north presence at All-Energy in Aberdeen in May. At these events there will be information available on marine renewable energy in the Pentland Firth, and also on the area as an attractive place in which to live and work.

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Food & Drink

The progress being made by North Highland Products Ltd through its "Mey Selections" brand continues to be good. Recently the company has agreed a deal to supply gourmet burgers to a national chain of "gastro pubs". The company continues to work with HIE to realise its growth aims. The Company is also participating in the Carbon Trust's "product carbon footprinting and labelling" initiative. It will be one of seven leading companies to trial the Trust's draft Publicity Available Specification (PAS) 2050 – the standard used to assess the lifestyle greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of goods and services. Caithness

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Beef & Lamb Ltd will open its new meat processing facility at Keiss this summer. This will create around 14 new jobs.

Transport

Local agencies continue to look at transport projects following the announcement of the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport projects Review in December 08. The Highland Council is discussing possible means of progressing roads schemes such as works at Berriedale to the point where a fully-engineered and costed proposal is available to be implemented when any funding becomes available. HITRANS has also been working with Stagecoach regarding further enhancements to its services within Caithness, and between Caithness and Inverness. A representative from Network Rail will also come north on 8th May to discuss its vision for the Far North Line. Caithness Transport Forum has now revised its "Transport Vision" document.

IT Connectivity

This is still an issue, and is most acute in north Sutherland, where some exchanges are not yet able to take ADSL broadband of above 512k. HIE's Regional Infrastructure team has been helping to pursue this issue, with a view to helping us set out a timetable for exchanges yet to be upgraded. We now understand that an agreement has been reached with BT on upgrading exchanges.

Access to loan capital: North Highland Regeneration Fund has now held discussions with over 79 companies/organisations in the north. This has resulted in the approval of 17 loans with a value of £717,000. A further 13 companies are in discussions regarding loans with a potential value of £445,000. Over the period of the loans awarded, 133 jobs were expected to be secured with a further 81 created. One company in receipt of loan funding from NHRF has gone into liquidation as a result of the current economic crisis with a loss to the fund of £32,000.

The Highland Council has secured match funding from the European Regional Development Fund to deliver a growth fund of £1.4m for new and established Highland businesses. The money will be administered by the Council's enterprise trust Highland Opportunity to part fund its *Highland Business Growth Fund* which provides support targeted at existing businesses operating in the priority sectors of Tourism and Culture, Energy, Food and Drink, Life and other Sciences and the Creative Industries, together with new start ups. This Fund can provide two year unsecured, interest-free, debt bonds to any eligible business in the Highlands which requires access to finance to start up or grow. Existing businesses are eligible for up to £50,000 and for business starts the maximum size of a single bond is £20,000.

Progress with other actions

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We have also begun discussions with this team on the potential impact of "next-generation" communications technology in the north. ¶

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The second issue of the Partnership's Newsletter will be issued with copies of the John o' Groat Journal and The Northern Times in mid March. We are also about to issue the second e-bulletin to our email list of businesses and groups. ¶

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I continue to attend community meetings to give progress reports and to gather views from as wide a range of local people as possible. During February I attended a meeting of the North Coast Federation of Community Councils where we discussed how the Caithness & North Sutherland Action plan impacted on the north Sutherland area, and how best the Plan could reflect local issues. ¶

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Tourism: North Highland Tourism has been awarded funding from HIE, the NDA and The Highland Council to enable it to recruit marketing staff to implement a marketing drive for the area. The Highland Council and Caithness Archaeology Trust are working on the construction phase of its Caithness Broch centre project at Auckengill. It is hoped that the new facility will be open later this year. CAT is also working on ambitious plans for an archaeological development around Spittal.

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Recreational Infrastructure: Halkirk Community Sports Foundation's funding bid to the Scottish Rural development Programme to support its plans to open a sports centre in Halkirk was unsuccessful. HCSF is now working on revised plans for the facility based on a smaller funding package.

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Main Towns Initiative: CNSRP Programme Manager has had discussions with both The Highland Council and Caithness Chamber of Commerce regarding potential support for measures to help local retailers to develop and market local town centres to customers. The Highland Council is also working on its detailed plans for the redevelopment of its offices in Market Square, Wick. This will potentially act as a catalyst for further town centre development opportunities. The Scottish Government has now announced its Town Centres Regeneration fund – offering £60M for projects across Scotland during 2009/10. Work is underway to prepare Caithness bids.

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The Highland Council's Wick office redevelopment project is also progressing: it is estimated that the project brief will soon be submitted to Council for approval.

Arts: The next round of Highland Culture Fund applications has been announced by Highland Council. Caithness & North Sutherland had 14 successful applications in round 1.

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National Nuclear Archive: This project has been transferred to the NDA Forss Team who, in partnership with DSRL, will now manage its implementation. Recruitment for a Project Manger is in progress. A new schedule and scope of work is to be completed by June 2009.

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DSRL "spin-out" businesses: The NDA/DSRL socio economic team are considering a small number of on-site functions which currently support the decommissioning programme and which may have the potential to become successful commercial businesses within Caithness. This may be achieved by 'spinning out' a service into the local supply chain as a stand alone business or by working in partnership with other companies to transition staff across into the local supply chain.

Work is progressing well, particularly on the analytical labs, and DSRL's priority throughout the year will be to develop a clear strategy and a fully scoped

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programme for inclusion in the site's lifetime plan. Working in partnership with HIE, DSRL socio economic team will ensure that there is a good understanding of state aid issues and will continue to support projects in developing business cases, market research etc. DSRL has now established a project board to consider services coming forward which may have the potential to continue beyond the completion of site decommissioning thus securing jobs in the county for the long term.

Skills: DSRL has held initial discussions with Cogent and Energy Utility Skills (the relevant sector skills council) on future skills requirements. Energy Utility Skills predicts a shortage of skilled resources (eg. engineers) around 2020. Further meetings are being arranged to discuss the DSRL resource profile and how this links to their future requirement. Future meetings will include representation from other key agencies of the CNSRP.

National Skills Academy, Nuclear: Support continues to be provided to the National Skills Academy, Nuclear in Scotland. At a recent skills award dinner three out of the seven national awards came to Caithness. Mathew Mackay, Vulcan apprentice, picked up the Scottish Apprentice of the Year, Michael Miller (Dounreay apprentice) was awarded the Foundation Degree HND/HNC Student of the Year and Jillian Bundy, DSRL Training Department took home the Outstanding Leadership in Skills. Members of the Partnership attended the Award Ceremony.

DSRL's Human Resource Manager, Michael Dunnett has now chairman of the Scottish Regional Steering Group of the National Skills Academy, Nuclear. Michael takes over from Jerry Abbott who recently retired. North Highland College have submitted an application to be a Quality Assured Provider to the Skills Academy. North Highland College has also been awarded a contract to develop the e-learning material for the new Award in Nuclear Industry Awareness.

DSRL Suppliers' day: On 26th March DSRL held talks with companies interested in building three new plants needed to complete the decommissioning of the site. More than 190 delegates representing 99 companies attended a one-day business event hosted by DSRL at the Weigh Inn Hotel, Thurso. The purpose of the event was to outline the scope of work involved in the construction projects and bring together companies capable of delivering them.

The three "new build" facilities scheduled for construction between 2010 and 2017 are a disposal facility for low-level radioactive waste, a plant for treating solid and liquid intermediate-level waste and facilities to empty the underground shaft and silo. The morning session consisted of a series of presentations about each project and the site procurement strategy, with opportunities for questions and answers. This was followed by opportunities for companies to have one-to-one discussions with each of the DSRL project teams.

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