

CAITHNESS & NORTH SUTHERLAND REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP**UPDATE REPORT,**

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May-July 2009

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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.

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Key Issues and highlights:

- Wick Marina has opened, and is already attracting new traffic through the harbour in Wick.
- North Highland College announces its £15M capital programme to create new research and training facilities at its Thurso site. These directly boost the competitive attraction of Caithness to the renewables industry and the local engineering supply chain.
- An audit of skills in Caithness & north Sutherland is now underway, with interim results expected for presentation at the Caithness Conference.
- Consultants undertaking the John O' Groats tourism Masterplan present their recommendations to the public at an exhibition in John O' Groats in July.
- Work has begun to develop a document that captures the area's vision for its future, so that the document can be used in contacts with incoming companies considering bidding for the Dounreay PBO contract or to those gaining seabed leases in the Pentland Firth. A final draft will be presented at the Caithness Conference.
- Caithness Beef & Lamb's new state of the art Abattoir and meat processing facility at Keiss is due to open in July.

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Progress with High Priority activities

Scrabster Harbour

Scrabster Harbour Trust is pleased that the proposed Phase I re-development of the harbour is progressing satisfactorily. The Trust is in negotiations with funding sources, particularly the NDA and HIE. It is also in discussions with potential inward investors. The Trust's new Chief Executive, Rod Johnstone, is expected to be in place by mid August. SHT is engaged in discussions and meetings with developers and relevant finance agencies for the proposed industrial business park.

Wick Harbour

The marina was opened in time for the very successful 2009 Homecoming HarbourFest at the end of June. Demand for berths at the new marina facility has already been strong with interest from local vessel owners. WHA is now working up plans for the next phase of development at the harbour.

Pentland Firth Project

There is a strong demand from developers wishing to locate their tidal devices in the Pentland Firth. Following the application deadline of 15th May The Crown Estate has announced that 42 site applications from 20 companies have been forwarded for evaluation. Crown Estate staff will interview applicants during July and once the evaluation process has been carried out the first sea bed lease documentation is expected to be signed between Sep-Dec 2009. Subject to obtaining other statutory consents it is envisaged that the first devices could be deployed in 2011. In the meantime talks aimed at providing a solution to the current grid constraints are continuing.

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. CNSRP, HIE and The Crown Estate will take part in an event for Chamber of Commerce members in August to further update local companies on opportunities.

Draft terms of reference for each workstream have been approved by the project's Coordination Committee (HIE, The Crown Estate, The Scottish Government) and the wider project stakeholder group met in June to assess progress and comment on the workstreams.

The announcement in June of the major development of the North Highland College campus has given a further boost to the project. A total of £15M funding has been secured to support the energy sector. This is made up of £11M capital

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 Access to finance: . 5¶
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estates monies together with a £4m marine research programme for the next four years. The capital monies will allow for the creation of two separate centres designed to improve the engineering training and research infrastructure of the College.

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A further £3m is earmarked to accommodate the new marine renewable energy team of the ERI which will see a doubling of the ERI staff complement

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The research element will further establish Caithness as a hub for marine energy research through the ERI's already strong academic links. The creation of the engineering skills centre will act as a major attractor for potential inward investors looking at current and future supply-chain skills (see below).

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Both of the new facilities will be built on the main campus in Thurso and require the removal of redundant, outdated buildings. In so doing the quality of the main campus, both structurally and architecturally, will be enhanced and better reflect the value of post school learning for today's needs generally and reinforce the importance of the energy sector to the economy.

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Engineering

North Highland College staff continue to work on the proposed engineering facility at the College. Peter Poulton is being employed by North Highland College to assist them with the Project. All project funding (£8M) is now secured and will provide over 4000 m2 of workshops, engineering design facilities, process rigs etc for apprentices and those retraining. A project users' forum (consisting of industry and apprentice training representatives) is now meeting with NHC-UHI to ensure the centre meets the needs of industry. NHC expects the centre to open for business in August 2011.

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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. The draft report on this project was presented to the group on 12th May, and is available to download from www.cnsrp.org.uk/downloads. 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.

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John O' Groats Tourism

HIE has commissioned a company (GVA Grimley) to develop a physical masterplan for John O' Groats. The master planning process included a public exhibition at John O Groats in July to show interim results. The masterplan will be completed this summer, after which detailed discussions on the way ahead for developments will be held.

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Inward Investment

HIE's Inward Investment Manager has been working mainly on leads within the energy sector, but has also been following up several leads from potential investors in the services sector.

HIE has commissioned a Skills Audit for the area, to be completed by Autumn 09. This will help local employers and potential inward investors with recruitment issues, and will also help agencies to tackle any skills gaps or skills transfer needs.

Fiona Macpherson was part of the Caithness presence at All-Energy in Aberdeen. At these events there was 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. She reported several excellent contacts with companies interested in the area.

We are also working with NDA colleagues on a document to bring together our aspirations as an area, so that we can communicate this effectively to the companies interested in this area through both the ongoing Crown Estate licensing round for the Pentland Firth and the imminent competition for the contract to become the new Parent Body Organisation for Dounreay. A joint workshop for local stakeholders was held in early July, with a view to delivering a final draft "vision document" at this year's Caithness Conference.

Food & Drink

Caithness Beef & Lamb Ltd will open its new abattoir and meat processing facility at Keiss in the next few weeks. This will initially create 10 new jobs, and will provide an opportunity to significantly add value to the local beef and lamb supply chain. There is real potential for joint working with the Mey Selections brand to minimise livestock transport and further reduce the carbon footprint of local businesses.

North Highland Products Ltd through its "Mey Selections" brand this year became the first Scottish consumer goods company to be certified with the Carbon Trust's Carbon Reduction Label with regard to their Luxury Shortbread and two of their Honey Products. HIE assisted the company to achieve this development.

Two food & drink companies based in the Caithness and north Sutherland area won "food Oscars" at the 2009 Scotland Food and Drink Awards in May. They are "Berry Good" from Caithness - best drink category; and "Cocoa Mountain" from Durness - food tourism category.

HIE has three priorities aimed at making the Food and Drink sector more competitive within the Region and to help drive growth. These are

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Deleted: She is working with colleagues in HIE and SDI on a proposition document and marketing materials for tourism. CNSRP will have a presence at a Homecoming Scotland "Gathering of the Clans" in Edinburgh in July, where we hope to have material available on the area.¶

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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 deriv

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- building our international reputation, - eg. through exhibitions and development of and within Scotland Food and Drink branding.
- collaborative value networks (supply chain development) – eg. in respect of specific growth opportunities and working with the supply chain of an Account Managed business and or industry group;
- innovation, leadership and productivity – eg. through Account Management of high growth companies.

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HIE's Key Sectors Team is developing a major skills programme for the sector focusing on innovation, sales and marketing with the particular aim of addressing issues identified as barriers to growth in Account Managed businesses. These businesses are seen as offering high growth potential within their sector of industry. Within Caithness & North Sutherland HIE currently has three food and drink businesses being Account Managed.

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 Transport Scotland came north on 4th June to discuss the Far North Line. An action here is for Caithness Transport Forum to respond to a forthcoming Scottish Government consultation on rail freight. Caithness Transport Forum has now revised its "Transport Vision" document. Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd has begun planning for the replacement of its Airfield Ground Lighting system, programmed to happen in financial year 2010/11.

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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. The Programme Manager will discuss with the Chamber of Commerce the possibility of bringing together a group of technology businesses to drive demand for super-fast broadband, 3G etc.

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Access to finance:

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 start-ups the maximum size of a single bond is £20,000. The North Highland Regeneration Fund has reported an increase in enquiries from businesses, directly attributable to "signposting" from staff at the Business Gateway service.

Progress with other actions

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 campaign for the area. The post of Marketing & Membership manager is being advertised nationally, with an appointment expected around September. Two further appointments will then be made.

The Highland Council and Caithness Archaeology Trust will officially open the Caithness Broch centre in July. This project has involved community organisations, agencies and the national museum of Scotland in its planning. CAT is also working on ambitious plans for an archaeological development around Spittal.

UHI is currently developing an innovative new BA in Tourism and Hospitality, to be based at Dornoch, with delivery throughout the north. This will be a 4 year degree course covering key aspects of industry, and will be available for new students in August 2011.

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.

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 has submitted two bids to the Scottish Government's Town Centre Regeneration Fund – one each for Wick and Thurso. Decisions on both will be announced in July. Thurso Community Council and local traders have met with the Chamber of Commerce and CNSRP to look at town centre issues, and the result is a pilot programme of late night shopping events over the summer in Thurso, to attract people back into local shops.

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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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The Highland Council's Wick office redevelopment project is also progressing: it is expected that the project brief will soon be submitted to Council for approval. This will potentially act as a catalyst for further town centre development opportunities.

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Arts: The next round of Highland Culture Fund applications, announced by Highland Council has an August deadline for local arts organisations. 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 have contracted DSRL to manage its implementation. A Project Manager has been recruited, and will start work this month, when a full scoping of the project work will take place. The scoping is expected to be complete by December 09.

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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.

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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 programme of work.

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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.

Deleted: The NDA and DSRL socio economic team intend to meet with Government's State-aid Unit to make initial contact and discuss issues. DSRL priority will be given to working up a fully-scoped programme for potential "spin-outs" for inclusion in the Downreay lifetime plan. A proposal for a project board to consider DSRL spin out businesses is being considered, and meetings continue with spin-out project teams to identify common issues which need to be addressed.¶ Skills:

The UKAEA Pensions Administration Office in Thurso has been awarded an extension of its contract by the NDA. This business is seen as having growth potential, particularly in the "niche" sector of smaller pensions schemes.

UKAEA's in-house IT support team has been outsourced to multi-national company CSC. The company recently opened its new office at the Science & technology park at Forss.

National Skills Academy for Nuclear: The Skills Academy has just announced its third round of Bursaries for individuals studying in decommissioning-related disciplines. Caithness has been successful in the previous two rounds.

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North Highland College has become the first quality assured training provider in Scotland for the National Skills Academy for Nuclear.

Caithness Conference 2009

The steering group that has guided the development of the past two Conferences met to discuss plans for a further event in 2009. It was agreed that there was value in having an event, and that it should remain around the same time of year. The date is Thursday 1st October at Wick Assembly Rooms, with Secretary of State for Scotland Jim Murphy MP one of the speakers.

Communications

The third issue of the Regeneration Partnership's Newsletter will be issued with copies of the John o' Groat Journal and The Northern Times in July/August. The CNSRP Programme Manager chaired a meeting with Communications staff from Highland Council, HIE and the NDA to discuss better integration of our collective work on press and communications.

Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
6th July 2009

Deleted: 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. ¶

Deleted: 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 wor (... [37])

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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.

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New Regeneration-focused Posts

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The NDA has appointed

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Anna MacConnell has started work

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as the NDA Socio-Economic Manager. She

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began work in her new role on 23rd March. She will be

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based at the NDA's Forss office.

HIE is recruiting a Tourism Manager and an Infrastructure Manager to help deliver key projects within the Action Plan. It is hoped that both will be in post by August.

Caithness Chamber of Commerce is recruiting an admin support post to assist Chief Executive Officer Trudy Morris.

North Highland Tourism is recruiting a full-time 3 year marketing & membership manager to help grow the value of tourism to our economy.

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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.		
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The funding package to deliver the Wick Marina has been agreed, following detailed discussions between Wick Harbour Authority (WHA), HIE, the NDA and The Crown Estate for both loan and grant elements.		
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ill be open in time for the		
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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. Discussions on the potential for waterfront developments to complement the marina facility can now take place between the Harbour Authority and local agencies.		
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The Crown Estate received expressions of interest from thirty eight companies.		
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A multi-million pound research-based facility will bring 12 new research posts to the area, and will further boost the area's ability to capitalise on opportunities from marine energy.		
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of the £14M programme		
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NDA continues to work with

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A Ministerial announcement on the project is expected by the end of June 09. An application for Outline Planning Permission has been granted by the Highland Council.

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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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will include stakeholder consultation and a

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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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e 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. Fiona Macpherson continues to have more detailed discussions with a number of these companies.

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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. Local HIE staff also

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shared a stand with Orkney's EMEC at an energy conference in Bath at the end of April, during which staff held meetings with developers.

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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.
IS it worth mentioning the carbon neutral labelling

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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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Initial discussions have been held between Cogent and Energy Utility Skills (the relevant sector skills council) on future skills requirements. EU Skills are predicting 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 this future requirement. DSRL staff took part in an entrepreneurial training course in September which was a follow up to a MBA study carried out last year. Feedback from the course was positive and feedback forms have been sent out to all those who attended to evaluate whether this course should be run again. The Strathclyde report from the course is awaited. There is a potential opportunity to include other staff across the NDA sites to carry out this training should it prove valuable. 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).

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A third e-bulletin is also in preparation, as is a further issue of the Newsletter.

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The CNSRP Programme Manager continues to attend community meetings to provide progress reports and to gather views from as wide a range of local people as possible. The CNSRP Programme Manager has met with Thurso & Wick Trades Council, presented an update on activities to representatives of local Churches and gave an update to the Board of Caithness Chamber of Commerce as well as attending a local NFUS meeting. On 13th June he will

attend the STUC Highlands & Islands Conference at the invitation of the local Trades Council.

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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.

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