

**Minutes of the DSG socio economic sub group meeting held on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009 at 1330 hours in the Pentland Hotel, Thurso.**

<b>Present:</b>	Derrick Milnes	Wick & Thurso Trades Council (Chair)
	Alastair MacDonald	DSG Chair
	Ronnie Johnstone	Church of Scotland
	David Sutherland *	Highland Council
	Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
	Carol Gunn	HIE
	Fiona MacPherson	Inward Investment Manager, HIE
	Rosemary Thompson	North Highland College
	Niall Smith	Caithness Voluntary Group
	Anna MacConnell	Caithness Partnership
	Eann Sinclair	CNS Regeneration Partnership
	Pat Gallagher	Rolls Royce, Vulcan
<b>In addition:</b>	June Love	DSRL, DSG Secretary
	Stuart Chalmers	NDA
	Bob Earnshaw	Thurso Community Council
	Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
	Roger Saxon	Viewfirth Steering Group
	Alan Gray	Pentarq (Viewfirth development)

**MINUTES**

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Derrick Milnes welcomed everyone to the meeting and made special mention of Trudy Morris (Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce) and to Roger Saxon/Alan Gray.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from George Bruce (Caithness Chamber of Commerce,) David Flear (Highland Council), Ken Nicol (DSRL Socio economic manager) Murray Lamont (North Highland Tourism), Randall Bargelt (NDA) and Marie Mackay (DSRL).

**3. Minutes of last meeting**

DSG/SESG(2008)M012 refers. There were no comments on the minutes and therefore were endorsed as a true record of the meeting.

**4. Progress on actions**

- M017/A001: NDA to report on progress of the national nuclear archives. *This action is ongoing. The NDA local team at Forss had taken ownership of this project late in December. Therefore at this time there was no progress to report.*
- M017/A029: All DSG members to consider appropriate articles for the CNS Regeneration Partnership newsletters. *Action complete – a 2<sup>nd</sup> newsletter was nearly completion and would be distributed shortly.*

- M017/A030: Ken Nicol to provide concept drawings for the proposed engineering training facilities. *Action complete – see DSG(2009)C006.*

Rosemary Thompson noted that the NDA had provided £2M funding of the projected £7M required. Funding requests had been submitted to Scottish Funding Council, Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

It was emphasised that the drawings were at the concept design only and further discussions, via a users forum, would help to firm up the requirements for the facility.

It was further noted that the engineering training facilities would be a new build as would the proposed new accommodation for the Environmental Research Institute.

Eann Sinclair asked whether planning permission had been applied for in advance of raising funding. Rosemary Thompson said permission in advance was dependent on the level of planning application required. She noted it was an iterative loop.

Derrick Milnes summed up by concluding that the ambitions for the North Highland College should be supported and hoped that the project went well for the future.

- M017/A031: Secretary to check with Highland Council status of Highland Council Report on sports/arts facilities. *Action complete – see DSG(2009)C022*

The response from the Highland Council with regards to the study on sports/arts facilities was noted. Discussion centred round the timing of the report being put forward for consideration.

David Sutherland (Highland Council) confirmed that the report would not be considered until the existing capital programme comes to an end in 2011/2012. Discussions would start in 2010 and the Highland Council were intending moving to a 5/10 year programme. The report on sports/arts, along with others, will be taken into the report at that time.

- M017/A032: All members to consider Ronnie Johnstone's comments on Highland Council's report on sports/arts facilities. *Action complete – discussed at this meeting*

Ronnie Johnstone said he was happy that this had been taken up and discussed fully, both here and at the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Advisory Board. It would appear that any proposal for such facilities would not be realised until the 2020s and therefore support for other projects could come forward in the shorter term. Eann Sinclair agreed adding that it was good to have clarity on this.

- M017/A035: Draft letter to Highland Council re importance of education services. The secretary noted that this action had been placed at DSG on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The letter had been circulated for comments but advice was required as to who the letter should be addressed to. It was agreed that the secretary would go back to George Bruce for clarity. *[Secretary's note: having spoken with George Bruce it was agreed that the letter would be sent to Chief Executive of the Highland Council and copied to the Education Minister as well as the local MSP and list MSPs.*

## 5. **Update on progress of Viewfirth redevelopment project**

Roger Saxon and Alan Gray attended to provide the update. Roger Saxon provided a summary of the work that had been done previously to get to this point. The NDA had intimated that they would consider gifting the Viewfirth land if a suitable proposal came forward. The DSG had been asked to consider this and at a public meeting it had been agreed that a Steering Group with community representatives be set up to take this project forward. A lot of work had been undertaken to reach the point where concept drawings had now been worked up taking into account feedback from the community on the potential requirements for a new community project.

Alan Gray, Pentarq, then tabled drawings and pictures of the proposed redevelopment. The designs include a games hall, conference facilities, children's play area, fitness room, restaurant and café, IT room as well as student-type accommodation. The design had taken into account environmentally friendly characteristics.

The concept designs would be made publicly available in Caithness Horizons and a public meeting would be organised for feedback on the concept designs. *[Secretary's note: public meeting is scheduled for 5<sup>th</sup> February, venue to be confirmed].*

In response to a question on the number of study rooms available it was confirmed there was 24-26. Rosemary Thompson noted that the North Highland College would be interested in student accommodation. It was also noted that student accommodation could also be sublet as holiday accommodation. Rosemary Thompson added that the North Highland College was rapidly expanding PhD numbers and this type of accommodation was just what was required which would allow stable usage.

It was confirmed that the overall height of the proposed development would be higher than the original Viewfirth building. It was estimated that the development would cost in the region of £5.5 to 9M.

Pat Gallagher noted that the study rooms/flats would add significantly to the cost of the development. He asked whether a business case confirmed whether this would be viable. It was confirmed that the next stage would be to set up a fund raising committee and in parallel to work up a robust business case to ensure the sustainability of such a project.

Bob Earnshaw noted that Ormlie Lodge was also under refurbishment to provide student-type accommodation. Rosemary Thompson said she would check this out to see what would be on offer there.

**ACTION: DSG/SESG(2009)M001/A001: ROSEMARY THOMPSON TO SEE WHAT ACCOMMODATION WOULD BE PROVIDED AT ORMLIE LODGE AND REPORT BACK TO NEXT MEETING.**

Eann Sinclair noted that there were quite a few different types of users for the proposed building. Alan Gray responded that the different areas would be flexible enough to change if required.

The DSG socio economic sub group would be kept updated on the proposals as they progress.

## **6. Community fund requests.**

DSG(2008)C231 was noted as a summary of approved funding requests carried out electronically since the last sub group meeting.

Apologies had been received from Marie Mackay who had provided a summary of requests for endorsement. It was agreed that the Secretary would take any comments back and a response would be provided by e-mail to allow endorsement (or otherwise) of the requests.

**ACTION: DSG/SESG(2009)M001/A002: MARIE MACKAY, DSRL, TO PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION FOR THOSE REQUESTS WHICH WERE QUERIED.**

## 7. Updates on socio economic activities

- CNS Regeneration Partnership Advisory Board:

Ronnie Johnstone provided a verbal update on his attendance, on behalf of DSG, at the Advisory Board which was held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2008. He had found it a useful discussion and full transparent and was optimistic on the issues discussed. There was still a need to clarify the role of the Advisory Board but it was felt that it was moving in the right direction and the role would become clearer and more meetings took place.

Anna MacConnell felt that the Advisory Board allowed a 'short-cut' to Sandy Park (Highland Council) and Alastair Dodds (CEO of Highland Council) which no-one else in the Highlands and Islands have. It was important to be in a position to ensure actions can be accelerated if required and there had been a very useful discussion on the transport strategy.

Eann Sinclair said that the Advisory Board would evolve over time. The Executive Board had developed a view on where they were now but it was recognised that this would continue to change. A timetable of dates for the forthcoming year had now been set and these dates would be circulated shortly to allow other meetings to be programmed in at appropriate times to allow time for views and feedback. *[Secretary's note: the DSG socio economic sub group meeting dates would be programmed in to suit these dates also].*

Ronnie Johnstone stated that it was all about trust and he was sure that relationships would grow over time.

Alastair MacDonald said that it appeared that things were progressing positively since the last couple of meetings. He believed there was a need for an Advisory Board but believed there was still a need to inform the public at large what was happening.

Eann Sinclair noted that the membership of the Advisory Board was beginning to be balanced with the addition of the Chamber of Commerce and the Wick and Thurso Trades Council. Membership, again, would evolve over time.

Peter Body noted that the action plan was the vehicle for reporting progress on the priority projects identified. As the action plan moves forward the Advisory Board will have more clarity on progress and will have the ability to provide advice on what is required.

It was also felt that the Caithness Conference which had been held over the past two years provided an opportunity for progress on the priority projects to be communicated to a larger proportion of the community.

- Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership

Eann Sinclair provided a verbal update.

- The Executive Board and Advisory Board had both met in December.
- The timetable for 2009 meetings had been issued
- The website had been launched in November 2008
- The first electronic bulletin had been issued in December.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> newsletter would be distributed, via the local papers, in late January/early February.
- The Executive Board were continuing to discuss such things as the Wick Tax Office and were currently in dialogue with other organisations to try to secure the services provided in Wick.
- The Fusion facility had been discussed at the Advisory Board and had received publicity. Currently a decision from Scottish Government as to whether they viewed this proposal as nuclear was awaited.
- The Crown Estate was driving forward proposals for the Pentland Firth. Expressions of interest by those who wish to be involved in the development stages were expected in about 10 days. It was still on course for a summer answer on leases for the seabed.
- The Pentland Firth Tidal Energy Board was progressing well.
- At the Advisory Board the action plan had been discussed and is now much more prioritised. Priority would now be given to the current economic circumstances faced to ensure that the action plan continues to be achievable. More detailed work programmes are now required for priority actions and this would be progressed over the next three months.

Alastair MacDonald noted that he was pleased to see a second newsletter as this was one vehicle in keeping everyone in the community informed of progress.

- HIE update

Carol Gunn, HIE provided a verbal update:

- HIE had set up additional activities to ensure that businesses had advice and support in the current financial climate, including a 0800 helpline and 1 to 1 advice for businesses.
- A local business clinic would be held in the Park Hotel on 17<sup>th</sup> February with HIE, banks and HMRC.
- HIE are considering the acceleration of capital projects.
- Business start up courses would be held on 27-29 January at Naver, Thurso and 24-26 March in Mackay's Hotel, Wick.
- Working closely with Scrabster and Wick harbours with their redevelopment plans. HIE, in association with the NDA, has approved funding for the Wick marina project and it is hoped that the marina will be operational by the Harbourfest this year.
- Working closely with Wick airport on a transformational project.

Anna MacConnell asked if the study recently carried out on Wick airport would be publicly available. Carol Gunn said they were currently finalising the document with the contractor and that the report would be available in the next few days.

- It was pleasing to see that engineering companies were currently recruiting.
- A meeting had been held in December between NDA, HIE and DSRL to explore ways of working better at an operational level. Colleagues in Argyll office were looking at the good practices established here.
- HIE had met with a couple of prospective contractors for taking over the IT services currently provided at Dounreay. This would involve the outsourcing of staff on the Dounreay site.

- The local team were involved in a trade mission to Vienna which included decommissioning and marine renewable opportunities. Three local companies had intimated their willingness to attend.

- Inward Investment update

DSG(2008)C225, C233 and C236 provided written updates covering the months October to December. Fiona MacPherson, Inward Investment Manager provided a verbal update:

- Crown Estate first phase on seabed leasing complete on 19<sup>th</sup> December with more than double the expected numbers expressing interest.
- Morgan Stanley was considering the feasibility of a data centre near the Castle of Mey.
- A Bristol company had opened an office in T3UK and meetings continued with other companies involved in renewables.
- A joint event with NSIG (North Scotland Industries Group) for developers and the local supply chain was proposed for later this year.
- Attendance at major renewable conferences is currently being considered.

Alastair MacDonald noted there was a requirement to ensure that the merits of living in Caithness and North Sutherland were available to help attract potential new business to the area. Fiona MacPherson confirmed that the Caithness brochure was now available and material on engineering, tourism and energy were currently being reviewed.

- DSRL update

DSG(2009)P001 refers. This paper was noted by members.

- NDA update

Stuart Chalmers provided a verbal update.

- NDA representatives will visit Caithness, at an appropriate time, to outline plans on the sale of land to the DSG.
- There were a number of applications requesting funding from the NDA socio economic panel. The local team were currently assessing these against the criteria and would pass to NDA HQ for consideration or request additional information from the requester.
- Interviews for the new NDA socio economic manager had taken place. NDA were currently awaiting response from the successful applicant.
- The competition for the Dounreay site had now been announced and this would ramp up in the next few months.

- North Highland Regeneration Fund

Derrick Milnes, DSG representative on the NHRF, reported that no meeting had taken place since the AGM held in October. A meeting was due to take place next week.

Eann Sinclair suggested that a joint report of all socio economic activities would be useful and offered to co-ordinate this. The sub group felt that this would be a good idea and would allow the sub group to focus and discuss the topics.

**ACTION: DSG/SESG(2009)M001/A003: EANN SINCLAIR TO CO-ORDINATE INFORMATION ON SOCIO ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES FROM ALL AGENCIES/ORGANISATIONS TO PROVIDE ONE SINGLE REPORT.**

- Caithness Chamber of Commerce

Peter Body provided a verbal update.

- Trudy Morris had been appointed new Chief Executive and started on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2009.
- The AGM would take place on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2009 and would navigate moving the Chamber from an un-incorporated body to an incorporated company limited by guarantee. The Council would step down on the 21<sup>st</sup> and a new Board appointed.
- The website had been revamped and launched.
- The Caithness Chamber would affiliate with the Aberdeen Chamber to allow the provision of a legal helpline and human resource support.
- At present the Chamber has 42 members and it is planned to increase this over the year to 135.
- The plan of activities for the coming year would be presented at the AGM and would evolve overtime to ensure the Chamber can provide what the members require.
- Trudy Morris would attend the Highland Economic Forum.
- Peter Body had received an invitation to sit on the Caithness business panel.

8. **Any Other Business**

- Derrick Milnes reported that a DSG representative would attend the Labour and Lib Dem political conferences scheduled for March.
- Anna MacConnell announced that the Caithness LEADER plan had been approved which opens up the potential to secure up to £1M funding.
- Planning consent for the low level waste disposal facility had been approved by Highland Council and this now goes to Scottish Government minister for consideration. No announcement on the community fund would be forthcoming until the Scottish Government had announced their decision.

There being no further business the meeting closed.

**Derrick Milnes**

DSG Socio economic sub group chairman

17<sup>th</sup> January 2009

## **PROGRESS ON ACTIONS**

### **ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING**

DSG/SESG(2009)M001/A001: ROSEMARY THOMPSON TO SEE WHAT ACCOMMODATION WOULD BE PROVIDED AT ORMLIE LODGE AND REPORT BACK TO NEXT MEETING.

DSG/SESG(2009)M001/A002: MARIE MACKAY, DSRL, TO PROVIDE JUSTIFICATION FOR THOSE REQUESTS WHICH WERE QUERIED.

DSG/SESG(2009)M001/A003: EANN SINCLAIR TO CO-ORDINATE INFORMATION ON SOCIO ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES FROM ALL AGENCIES/ORGANISATIONS TO PROVIDE ONE SINGLE REPORT.

### **ACTIONS OUTSTANDING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

M017/A035: NDA to report progress on the national nuclear archives at the next socio economic sub group meeting.