

DSG Socio-economic sub group meeting, 21/07/2010

Update from CNSRP

This update 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.

Key Issues and highlights:

- Energy Minister Jim Mather MSP visited Scrabster Harbour and gave support to the Trust's multi-million redevelopment proposals.
- Caithness Chamber of Commerce is to begin detailed study with leading marine device developer to map its requirements for device production and operation, and to map area capabilities to meet these requirements. The approach will be repeated through HIE with other developers.
- A Stage 1 ESF application for a workforce transition programme for Caithness & North Sutherland has been approved. It was submitted by Skills Development Scotland on behalf of a group of agencies and local bodies.
- Work has now started on North Highland College's £7M Engineering Skills Centre.

Progress with High Priority activities

Scrabster Harbour

Scrabster Harbour Trust is now at an advanced stage of discussion with key funders regarding its redevelopment project. NDA is putting final approval paper to DECC.

Scottish Government Energy Minister Jim Mather MSP visited Scrabster on 5th July and said that the Harbour's plans played "a central role in realising Scotland's renewable energy 'revolution.'"

Wick Harbour

WHA has received funding support from the NDA to undertake investigation work on opportunities for the Harbour in renewable energy.

Pentland Firth Marine Energy Project

Work is now focused on discussions with individual marine device developers and Pentland Firth Round 1 leaseholders to determine requirements for infrastructure, skills and supply chain. Chamber of Commerce has received funding from DSRL to undertake a joint study with one device developer to ascertain its requirements in these three areas, and then to map the area's capabilities/ capacities to service these requirements.

Work continues on the Centre for Energy & the Environment at North Highland College. The work is currently on schedule, and the building is expected to be in use by early 2011.

Engineering/ Skills

Several Caithness engineering companies have joined a consortium bidding to re-open the Nigg yard in Easter Ross.

Caithness Chamber of Commerce led a successful mission to All Energy 2010 in Aberdeen in May.

Groundwork on North Highland College's Engineering Skills Centre began in early July. This £7M facility is due to accept its first student intake in August 2011.

A group has been working on an ambitious "workforce transition" scheme for the area, encompassing direct DSRL employees, Dounreay supply chain workforce, and new entrants to the workforce (encompassing apprenticeships). A stage 1 submission to the European Social Fund was made by Skills Development Scotland and has now been cleared to proceed to Stage 2. The Stage 2 deadline is mid August. If successful the scheme could start in January 2011.

HIE has launched a £2.4M Graduate Placement Programme aiming to place 350 graduates in SMEs across the Highlands & Islands Enterprise area.

John O' Groats Tourism

HIE staff are now working to take forward developments following the successful launch of the Masterplan for John O'Groats in September 2009. This has now resulted in a significant announcement of private sector interest from Heritage GB (the current owners of the land around the former hotel) and Natural Retreats (a specialist in short-break holidays). The two companies estimate that the £6.5M scheme could be operational for the 2012 visitor season.

Heritage GB and Natural Retreats held a two-day pre-planning public consultation event in John O' Groats in June to gather initial feedback on their proposals which include 5* self catering accommodation provision at John O' Groats.

<http://www.hie.co.uk/john-ogroats-masterplan-2009.htm>

Around 600 cyclists set off from John O Groats on 11th June as part of a 9 day challenge to raise funds for ParalympicsGB.

Inward Investment/ Business Growth

HIE commissioned a study into companies with high energy-usage requirements, in order to anticipate any opportunities arising from power generation before adequate grid capacity is available. A number of specific company leads are now being pursued.

HIE approved £61,000 to Kongsberg Maritime Ltd (KML) to install a Diamond Turning Lathe and monitoring kit which will allow them to develop their own custom built lenses. The state of the art tool means that the business won't have to buy in 'optical domes' which form a key part of their cameras.

HIE has approved a funding package to CSC Caithness - a grant of up to £37,500; to help grow the workforce in Caithness and secure their business within the area. The approval relates to non-Dounreay work taking place in the area.

A&D Sutherland had funding of £28,300 approved towards the purchase of new stone-cutting equipment.

HIE has approved a funding package of £25,000 to Ashley Ann Ltd to help promote their new product range "Fusion"

The HIE Board has chosen Alex Paterson, currently HIE's Director of Regional Competitiveness, to be the organisation's next Chief Executive.

Food & Drink

No report.

Transport

The Highland Council has approved £10,000 and secured funding from partners HITRANS and DSRL to carry out feasibility studies for road safety work on the A9 Trunk road around Berriedale. This work is being undertaken

with a view to having a fully-engineered and costed proposal available to be implemented when funding becomes available.

HITRANS has just published its Freight Capabilities Study, the key conclusion for the Far North Line being “The physical limits on the FNL ought to allow a commercially viable freight train to operate out of Invergordon, albeit that constraints south of Inverness might cause a reduction in both length and/or GTL(Gross Trailing Load, or the total weight of a full train). There is also a lack of clearance for Class 66 locos between Georgemas and Wick.”

IT Connectivity

Scottish Government has announced its agreement with BT to upgrade 7 exchanges in our area. Some will receive full ADSL broadband for the first time, whilst others are being expanded to cope with additional demand for broadband.

The IT Connectivity working group we brought together in November last year has seen its efforts bearing fruit. HIE is now carrying out a study into the issue, and from that work we are already identifying additional opportunities both for existing businesses and potential inward investors with large data usage/ transmission requirements.

The potential for developing a pilot project for next generation access (also known as “super-fast broadband”) in Caithness & north Sutherland is now being investigated.

Everybody Online Caithness has just comp

Young people & Entrepreneurship: Pulteneytown People's Project has now secured funding for its ambitious community, training and enterprise centre in Wick. Tenders for the work have now been received, and work is hoped to start this summer.

National Nuclear Archive: Edinburgh firm Reiach and Hall has been commissioned for the design phase of the project.

Progress with DSRL socio-economic activities:

PBO discussions: Representatives from Babcock and DSRL met to discuss ideas for skills sharing. A strategy paper is currently being drafted to explore further a way of closer working between the Babcock sites.

Training Department: Work continues to develop a business plan for Training at Naver. This is a long term plan to explore whether there could be commercial viability for this service following the closure of the site.

Simulators: DSRL facilitated a meeting between North Highland College, GSE Systems and Marine5 to explore ways of working together to develop a training simulator in Caithness. The simulators have a number of potentials including control training (for marine renewables), upskilling of staff from nuclear to renewables, general education and Smart grid training. The parties involved plan to produce a document by late September explaining the potential opportunity, outline costs and likely demand.

IFMIF: John Thurso, MP raised the question of IFMIF at Prime Minister's question time. The initial response from the Prime Minister was that he would take his representations seriously. This resulted in some press interest and John Thurso has asked for further information. DSRL are at present taking the lead in this and will provide the information.

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