



Update Report from CNSRP

DSG Socio-economic Sub-group meeting, 19/01/11

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:

- Further public sector funding of £2.5M from the European Regional Development Fund has now been approved to Scrabster Harbour Trust to help develop the harbour as a key component of Scotland's renewable energy infrastructure. This brings the total confirmed public sector funding for the Scrabster Harbour Project to £9.5M.
- HIE has commissioned a study into supply chain requirements and opportunities related to tidal power developments.
- Invicta New Park has been awarded £3M in grant support from the European Regional Development Fund to further its plans for demonstration biomass Combined Heat & Power plants at Georgemas and Forss.
- HIE and DSRL funding has been approved to enable the start of a pilot STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) programme in local schools in partnership with The Highland Council.

Progress with High Priority activities

Energy:

The European Regional Development Fund has approved £2.5M in grant support to the Scrabster Harbour development. This brings to £9.5M the total confirmed in grant support from the public sector, following previously-announced approvals from NDA (£2M) and HIE (£5M). Discussions with Scottish Government funding streams continue. Additionally HIE has approved £150,000 to support costs associated with ground investigation works, and £25,000 to support engineering fees and costs associated with tendering work.

Highland Council continues to work with The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, HIE and Scottish Government on an onshore development framework to support marine energy. A second workshop will be held in Caithness on 15th February, following the first workshop in August last year.

Invicta New Park has been awarded £3M in grant support from the European Regional Development Fund to further its plans for demonstration biomass Combined Heat & Power plants at Georgemas and Forss. The Company has also seen a welcome commitment by Scottish Government to the level at which ROC banding will apply to biomass schemes over their lifetime.

Wick Harbour Authority continues to pursue opportunities in renewable energy, particularly through offshore wind developments in the Moray Firth. Several studies are underway examining engineering feasibility and port property.

HIE has commissioned research into several areas of potential inward investment in the energy sector (oil & gas opportunities, electrical and subsea supply chains for renewables and Pentland Firth Research, Design & Development opportunities). It is hoped that the results of this research will be a list of potential companies to approach with specific Caithness/ North Sutherland offers. Further research commissions (proximity-based supply chain gaps and environmental monitoring) will commence in January 2011.

HIE Area team has begun its "Caithness Ambassadors" programme. This brings together groupings of senior business people from across the UK with Caithness connections. The aim of the programme is to secure inward investment "leads" or referrals from these businesspeople. The first event will take place in Aberdeen.

Business Services:

HIE completed a research study into potential targets for inward investment in the area of business services (including call centres and home-working). Around 30 target companies were identified for further contact, with a view to marketing Caithness and north Sutherland as a potential base for business. HIE has been working with SDI to approach these companies to consider investment in Caithness & North Sutherland. Further interest has been shown by several of the companies targeted.

Further research work (into "higher skill" areas such as accountancy, design, procurement) will commence in April 2011.

Progress with enabling activities:**IT Connectivity**

CNSRP IT Connectivity Group met in January to discuss updated timetables for the programme to pilot superfast broadband access in the area. Members heard an update from HIE on the procurement arrangements currently being finalised. They also discussed potential local benefits from Ofcom's recent announcement that 2G mobile telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas would be released for 3G usage.

Skills Transition

Caithness Chamber of Commerce expects during January to hear the outcome of its application to the European Social Fund for the Skills Transition project. This will be the last element of the funding package, and if successful will enable work to start almost immediately on the £2.3M programme. Tenders for some preliminary work have been issued.

Staff from the Scottish Credits and Qualifications Framework Partnership have also offered support to the programme. SCQFP is an organisation established to promote lifelong learning in Scotland. It may be particularly useful in terms of Accreditation of Prior Learning, where members of the area's workforce can have their skills and competencies benchmarked against a national framework to enable them to have their skills recognised in a more formal manner. Staff from SCQFP are currently discussing with DSRL the accreditation of DSRL Competency Frameworks and Technical Competencies. The results of this are expected by the end of January 2011.

HIE and DSRL funding has enabled a project focusing on the learning of science, technology, engineering and maths in local primary and secondary schools. This will enable greater input from industry via the already established network of STEM ambassadors, and will also allow teachers and students enhanced industry placements etc to improve both learning opportunities and career decision-making. It will complement the work being developed through the Skills Transition programme.

Caithness Chamber of Commerce will host an event in January on "the future of education in Caithness" at which key speakers will be the new Rector of Wick High School, the Principal of North Highland College and the manager of STEM developments in Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

NDA/DSRL/ PBO

Discussions continue between NDA, DSRL and Babcock to agree a written "partnering agreement" that will help further align partner spending around the priorities agreed in the Caithness & North Sutherland Action Plan. DSRL is working on its Socio-economic Plan for 2011/12, and a paper on this will be submitted to the socio-economic subgroup of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group in January to discuss the content of the Plan.

Progress with other activities

John O' Groats Tourism: Planning permission was granted to Natural Land LLP for alterations, extension and change of use of John O Groats House Hotel to holiday apartments; erection of 23 detached holiday units; alteration and extension to existing Journey's End Cafe Bar; and an ancillary services building.

Business Growth: So far in financial year 2010/11 Business Gateway has supported 14 new business starts in Caithness.

Food & Drink: North Highland Initiative has begun a scoping study into its future direction. NHI is the initiative launched in 2005 by HRH The Duke of Rothesay, and has three interrelated strands of work: North Highland Tourism, North Highland Products and North Highland Connections. These cover tourism, food & drink and arts/ culture respectively.

Transport

Rail: Caithness Transport Forum is responding to a Network Rail consultation on the next Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland, urging investment in both freight and passenger services on the Far North Line to meet potential demand from decommissioning and renewable energy sectors.

Road: Geophysical survey work at Berriedale Braes should be completed by the end of March 2011, with the final report on options to deliver road improvements at Berriedale expected by summer 2011.

Air: Caithness Transport Forum has written to Scottish Government to seek a review of the recent decision to remove business travel from the eligible usage of the Air Discount Scheme.

Tourism: HIE's Tourism Manager for Caithness & North Sutherland has arranged a workshop session in January to commence its "Ambitious for Tourism: Caithness and North Sutherland" programme to further develop industry opportunities in tourism.

Main Towns Initiative: funding for this programme has now been successfully secured. Recruitment will start in mid January, with a development officer expected to be in place by end of March 2011. Discussions with North Highland College have also taken place, to explore innovative retail training opportunities.

National Nuclear Archive:

NDA has announced that the National Nuclear Archive project will not be taken forward at present, due to revisions in NDA spending priorities following the UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, and uncertainties over availability of match funding for the project. The NDA has, however, said that it remains committed to building an Archive in Wick. A review of the NDA's information management strategy is being undertaken, and further information on the scope and timetable for any future work will be given once this has been completed.

Eann Sinclair,
CNSRP Programme Manager