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10 November 2021

Peter Faccenda
CNSRP Programme Manager

Dear Peter

At the last CNSRP Joint AGM held on 19th August those attending were asked to feedback thoughts on a number of topics. We must apologise for the lateness of this response but below is the DSG's collective comments:

In general terms, there is a need for the CNSRP partners to work better together. This means focussing on the projects that add value from a sustainable perspective (environment, social and economic). Where projects fall within an individual organisation's remit they should lead on that project but draw in other partners (and possibly wider) to ensure projects are delivered in a way that complements other projects, involves collaboration and maximises positive outcomes.

Joint AGM Actions:

Action 1: Suggest how to review a positive way forward for our area.

Caithness has never been very good at self-promotion and yet there are a number of positives for the future as long as the agencies and community continues to work together collectively to secure these opportunities for the long-term future.

We believe that communication is key. However, we don't believe that the partner organisations maximise the opportunity to proactively promote the partnership or the benefits it can deliver for the area through the combined strengths of the partner organisations. Furthermore, we believe that it is essential that the CNSRP Executive Board should be pushing these messages through their respective organisations to ensure that partnership working is key to the area's success and this would allow CNSRP to capitalise on a number of PR opportunities. If each partner organisation can't support a partnership approach to PR then there is a need for a dedicated comms resource for CNSRP. There is a lot to be confident about – geography can be one of the advantages because of offshore wind, space hub, oil and gas, hydrogen, airport etc.

Review in a positive way: The Vision requires an update and a number of activities that may support this. NDA is carrying out social impact studies of the communities around their sites and DSRL are in the midst of undertaking a skills audit and are currently developing a new Life Time Plan, which is expected to take around 18 months to develop. Taking all this on board perhaps the beginning of next financial year is a good time to reset the clock and start the process of developing a new vision.

Specifically on the vision:

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- The current vision was for 2020 therefore there is a requirement for a new vision covering 2020 to 2050 with a review every five years.
- It should seek to have stakeholder buy-in and reflect that efforts should now contribute towards sustainable growth and net zero carbon.

From a new vision the objectives should also be considered and updated to reflect the strategy is about maintaining or increasing the GDP (in a sustainable way) of the area. This needs to be reflected in terms of promoting existing employment, encouraging new employment and promoting the area as an attractive location to live and work.

Other considerations when addressing the objectives should include discussions on whether other objectives should be added, i.e.

- To cooperate with partners and stakeholders to improve the [wellbeing](#) of citizens through education, health, culture etc. Whilst wellbeing is the remit of the individual community planning partnerships for Caithness and Sutherland, CNSRP policy and objectives should be complementary to their work.
- To ensure best public value from inward investment.
- To scrutinise the progress towards the individual development targets and suggest changes where necessary.

While partnership working is established it may be worthwhile having the discussion to explore the appetite of whether other stakeholders feel they should be included, even if this is identified as those who need to be consulted or informed to ensure that those who are working actively are aware of the bigger picture of the economic activities undertaken by the CNSRP.

It may also be worthwhile considering whether sub-groups of CNSRP are set up to look at, for example, a funding committee that could include funds from Windfarms and other community funding bodies (i.e. Caithness & North Sutherland Fund) so that there can be a shared vision of funding opportunities and more funding is made available for such things as economic feasibility studies etc.

On the questions raised re **Advisory Board**:

- We believe all members need to sit back and reflect on why they are there. If the Advisory Board is not challenging progress of the projects then what is it there to do?

It is believed that Advisory Board members are not there to come up with project ideas albeit one would expect they would table ideas if they had them but ideally they should understand the timeline for the priority projects, these should be reported on by way of programme activity and the CNSRP partners should be challenged if there are major delays so that stakeholders can understand what the blockers are to progress.

It would also be useful that as well as challenging programme activities,

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stakeholders look positively at activities and seek to engage in a way that support can be provided if required.

- In addition, and with no disrespect to the Advisory Group chair, they are from Caithness and should be sitting on the other side of the table questioning progress on the various projects. The chair of the advisory board should not be one of the partner organisations as again they are there to respond to questions and explain rationales etc.

A chair should be identified that is completely independent of CNSRP partner organisations or the organisations that sit around the Advisory Board. The CNSRP Independent chair may be someone to consider – given we have been getting used to blended meetings this should not necessitate the chair having to meet in person if arrangements did not allow. These could be in the form of blended meetings. If the Independent CNSRP Chair chaired the Advisory Board they would be in a much better position to report back to the Executive Board the views and perceptions of the stakeholder community.

- Community Development Trusts to be added to the group: While sometimes it is better to have everyone in the tent to ensure all organisations be they private, public or third sector as fully aware of the projects and direction of travel of CNSRP – it would need to be very carefully thought out – expectations should be set that just because they are in attendance it is not an automatic opportunity to look at CNSRP partners as potential funders of projects.

Membership needs to be mapped out to explore whether there are any organisations that could provide useful input that are not already on the Advisory Board.

That said members of the Advisory Board are there to view progress being made NOT to come with their own agenda and should not be there to promote a 'pet' project.

Membership should be pro-active and looking at the big picture.

- Wick town centre could be given more emphasis – goes back to what is CNSRP all about – long term projects, long term jobs. Does town centre fit into the overall CNSRP remit – yes for certain organisations and would assume Highland Council is best placed to support any town centre initiatives. Should there be subgroups – as an example if HC are the lead partner to look at town centre improvements then they convene a sub group that discusses this in full with other organisations with an interest. In turn the HC lead comes back to Advisory Board with an update and ensures a two-way communication is set up.
- Wick/JOG airport is pivotal – not only agree – completely agree and the community need to fight for this – public agencies are too close to Scottish Government and unfortunately their hands are tied. Noting that Scottish Government is a partner within the CNSRP Executive Team it is equally important that Scottish Government also start playing their part – the part

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funding for the airport is an example of lack of government understanding of what is required in the area.

- One last comment DSG would make – the Advisory Board tends to meet quarterly, papers are issued, there is a nice chat around the table.

Perhaps each member organisation needs to reflect on how they could help or lead a certain element of a project to get involved with CNSRP. This is not just about the CNSRP delivering, it's about the community and the organisations ensuring that success can be achieved. Share the workload, work to the strengths of each of the representative groups and ensure that Advisory Board members (through their organisations) start taking a far more pro-active role – this would allow CNSRP to concentrate on progressing priority projects while other organisations could be marshalling, collating, responding to elements of the CNSRP work that are not directly related to delivering the programme but could enhance/support by clear messaging, clear actions and delivery of such actions. We believe if an organisation is sitting around the Advisory Board table then it is incumbent on all organisation reps to take some of kind ownership in supporting and enhancing projects.

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