



Programme Manager Update – January 2023

Background

Focus North, the informal partnership of the main public and private sector bodies with a socio-economic remit in the far north of Scotland (previously CNSRP), has been working together since 2007 to develop the economy in Caithness and North Sutherland. Partners are: - The Caithness Chamber of Commerce; Dounreay Site Restoration Limited; The Highland Council; Highlands & Islands Enterprise; The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority; Skills Development Scotland; and The Scottish Government.

Strategic direction for the partnership is driven by the Executive board, consisting of Chief Executives, Directors, and other Senior officers of the partner organisations. Supporting the Executive board is an Advisory Board, which provides strong links to community, third sector, commercial and other public body representatives.

Rationale and approach to change

When established, the partnership's focus was on replacing job losses anticipated from Dounreay during its decommissioning. Its work has already helped to create and sustain hundreds of jobs but there is now renewed enthusiasm as significant opportunities are developing that can further transform the local economy. The board recognised that these opportunities, the changing Dounreay decommissioning timetable, and other major impacts such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and Brexit offered the perfect time to revisit the Partnership's identity, focus, goals, and programme of activities.

The review process was undertaken through a series of workshops with local representative officers from all partners fully involved. The approach has been widely shared amongst stakeholders, including with this committee, as it was developed with feedback being sought and adopted where appropriate. During the review process, it also became apparent that a new identity for the partnership would be beneficial in keeping with its refreshed goals and the new identity Focus North has been selected. It is felt that this identity both embodies the intention of the partners and allows a rallying call to those outside the region to look at the opportunities here.

The new identity and approach have subsequently formally adopted by the Partnership's Executive board. A formal, high-profile relaunch of the new entity, Focus North, with its new approach and programme is planned for the 8th February 2023.

The opportunities and approach

There are several imminent large scale regional developments including: - SpaceHub Sutherland, Pentland Floating Offshore Wind Farm and Scotwind Leasing round Offshore wind farms; Onshore windfarm, power storage, transmission, load balancing and grid stabilisation projects; the expansion of the MeyGen Pentland Firth tidal stream power generation array; Hydrogen production, storage, and usage; the Flow Country bid to become a UNESCO world heritage site and Scottish Government's national priority to restore and protect peatland; and a still growing tourism market.

Fully embracing and maximising the local benefits of the opportunities outlined above will be a key factor and in reversing the feared population decline and demographic shifts. These opportunities can offer the region's young people the potential for sustainable and fulfilling employment, enabling



them to remain in the region. This aligns well with Focus North's goals and the Scottish and UK Governments' goals to achieve a Just Transition to a net zero economy over the coming decades.

To maximise the local benefits from the regional opportunities some changes in approach have been incorporated in Focus North's methodology. Greater focus is being placed on maximising immediate opportunities to support economic diversification and population growth more generally. Less emphasis is being placed on the detailed Dounreay Decommissioning timetable. Developing the current opportunities will help establish a more diversified economy increasing local opportunities for alternative employment in the short, medium, and longer term. Just transition principles will be embedded in the developing programme of activities, as will climate change adaption measures and sustainability goals. The two key documents attached¹ describe the core activities the partnership will undertake and how the partners will work together to achieve this.

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16 Jan 23

¹ Focus North Organisational Structure, roles, and responsibilities, and Focus North Masterplan