

Dounreay Stakeholder Group

Socioeconomic Sub-Group

Focus North Programme Update

12 April 2024

General

The annual Focus North Conference was held at the Norseman Hotel in Wick on the 19th of March which was attended by 163 people. We launched the simplified Focus North Programme (Inspire, Prepare, Grow) supported by new infographics – 2 of the programme, and a ‘regional timeline’ that was well received. The programme infographics capture the overall programme structure and highlights the goals under each of the three headers. The new programme approach is also action/outcome focused and is reflected in the tracking spreadsheet which we are using to manage programme activities. A link to a shared drive hosting this has been circulated. Feedback from the conference has been positive. The joint Advisory board/Executive Board meeting identified the desire for more active advocacy on behalf of the partnership – and additional collateral to do this will be developed.

Industry Forum

- Following the successful Industry Forum on 29 February, which was well attended by offshore and onshore wind, tidal, space, nuclear, networks and supply chain companies an action plan is emerging. The first two areas of agreed collaboration identified are: -
 - A skills/talent/people strand – Produce a detailed skills map quantifying likely jobs/skills required across developments and indicative dates when these jobs will be required - Lead: Dounreay.
 - Examine existing community benefit initiatives and consider how to align these to maximise investment and amplify impact in the region. Lead: Jacobs
- Crucially, attendees agreed to meet again and create a constituted group through which to channel the above activities.

Next steps –

Focus North partnership to discuss how Industry Forum integrates with existing partnership structure (or how partnership structure adapts to support industry forum goals).

Following post-event feedback, Focus North to also consider and articulate a better defined regional ‘vision’. This coincides with Highland Council commencing a process of engagement and development of place plans.

Skills and Talent

Priority actions underway:

- **Skills Strategy / Innovation and Science Park:** DG members provided positive feedback to the Innovation and Science Park concept. This idea continues to develop with support from a

University of Chester researcher, working alongside UHI (who have now employed a Low Carbon Hub co-ordinator) and other partners. The research looks at other models taking the 'quadruple helix' approach and is investigating funding opportunities with a potential call closing later in April.

- Regardless of the outcome of the Innovation and Science Park discussions, we have fleshed out several strands of a skills strategy for the region:
 - **Net Zero Nation** – Focus North cohort launched at conference with a second Dounreay cohort to launch in the next financial year. Net Zero Nation provides fully accredited and supported decarbonisation plans for businesses.
 - **Privately subsidised apprenticeships** – launched by the Chamber of Commerce during Apprenticeship Week with initial funding from Dounreay to allow for enhanced support package for employers. Seeking more industry investment to expand.
 - **Skills Transition Academy** – Focus North and Dounreay met with X-Academy to discuss potential for skills transition/graduate development programme locally. The X-Academy model provides 2 years' employment for trainees who then participate in tailored training and industry placements before moving into permanent energy jobs.
 - **Talent attraction initiative** – Recruitment specialist now in post and 3x1 working on developing Recruit North Highland website and employer toolkit.
- **Peatland restoration training ('For Peat's Sake')** – Awaiting NatureScot and UHI launching the course. Multiple interested parties – training expected to commence Aug/Sept.

Next steps – Skills plan launched at conference on 19 March. Ongoing discussions with X-Academy.

Transport for employment

The Urban Foresight demand study proposed:

- To meet remote and rural areas' needs via **small multi-occupancy electric vehicles**, some of which would be demand responsive.
- To integrate this provision with conventional buses on more populated routes.
- Provide more active travel around urban centres with, for example, electric bikes.

Dounreay now leading this strand and meeting with Highland Council to discuss opportunities to collaborate and pilot level activities.

Space Industry Opportunities

HIE leading on space cluster development activities.

Peatlands restoration

PF continues to support Flow Country Green Finance Initiative (FCGFI), led by NatureScot, seeking to attract private investment into peatland restoration projects. The 4C report on potential Economic Impact circulated in December highlights a **very large potential benefit** in employment and community benefit. IRNS (Investment Readiness for Nature in Scotland) project (£100k grant) now completed – final report submitted. £240k from FIRNS (successor scheme to IRNS) & National Lottery Heritage fund, have allowed the recruitment of a **peatland restoration officer** & two pilot schemes are now being progressed. Peatland Action grant submission for cost of first pilot submitted.

Flow Country Partnership SCIO and the Subsidiary Flow Country Restoration Ltd has now been established and the Charity was 'soft launched' at Focus North and Peatlands conferences.

Next steps –

Mobilise organisation, management processes and operations for Charity and FCRLtd. Second employee (project officer) being recruited to support this.

Finalise external investment – several discussions with potentials underway.

Digital economy

Focus North is continuing in advanced discussions with a potential edge **data centre**. It is felt that any digital strategy for the region would have the best chance of success if it grew from industry investment.

Next steps - Further developments will be shaped by the results of these deliberations.

Focus North support for regional projects.

- PSO – Scottish Government has confirmed another year's funding for the Wick-Aberdeen PSO but indicated that further work needs to be carried out on creating a sustainable plan not only for the route but for the airport. This will involve a dedicated working group of which Transport Scotland will be a member.
- Partners to agree an approach to this process - discussion in agenda for meeting 9 April 24.

Promotion and awareness-raising.

Considerable progress has been made in regional promotion, including:

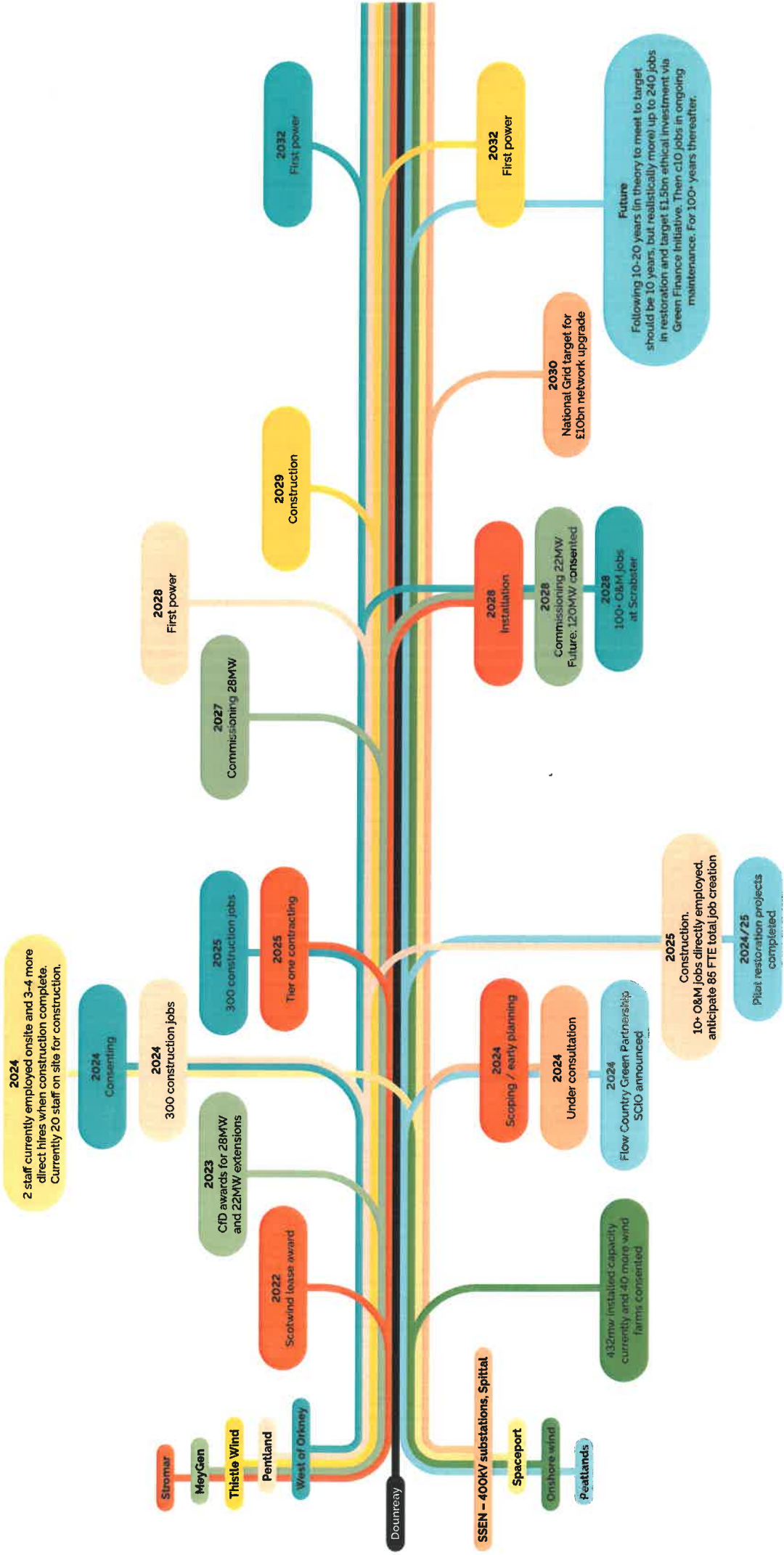
- Regional promotional film – launched at conference.
- Ambassadors – first two films complete and launched at. Further possible ambassadors identified – but any other suggestions welcomed.
- Website development – website well received – more content added but yet more needed.
- Films and conference recording available on the website.

Next steps –

Capitalise on momentum from conference and seek to harness that positivity into action.

A wrap report for the conference is being sent with key points from and pointing to the full survey data. Social media campaign building on this underway.

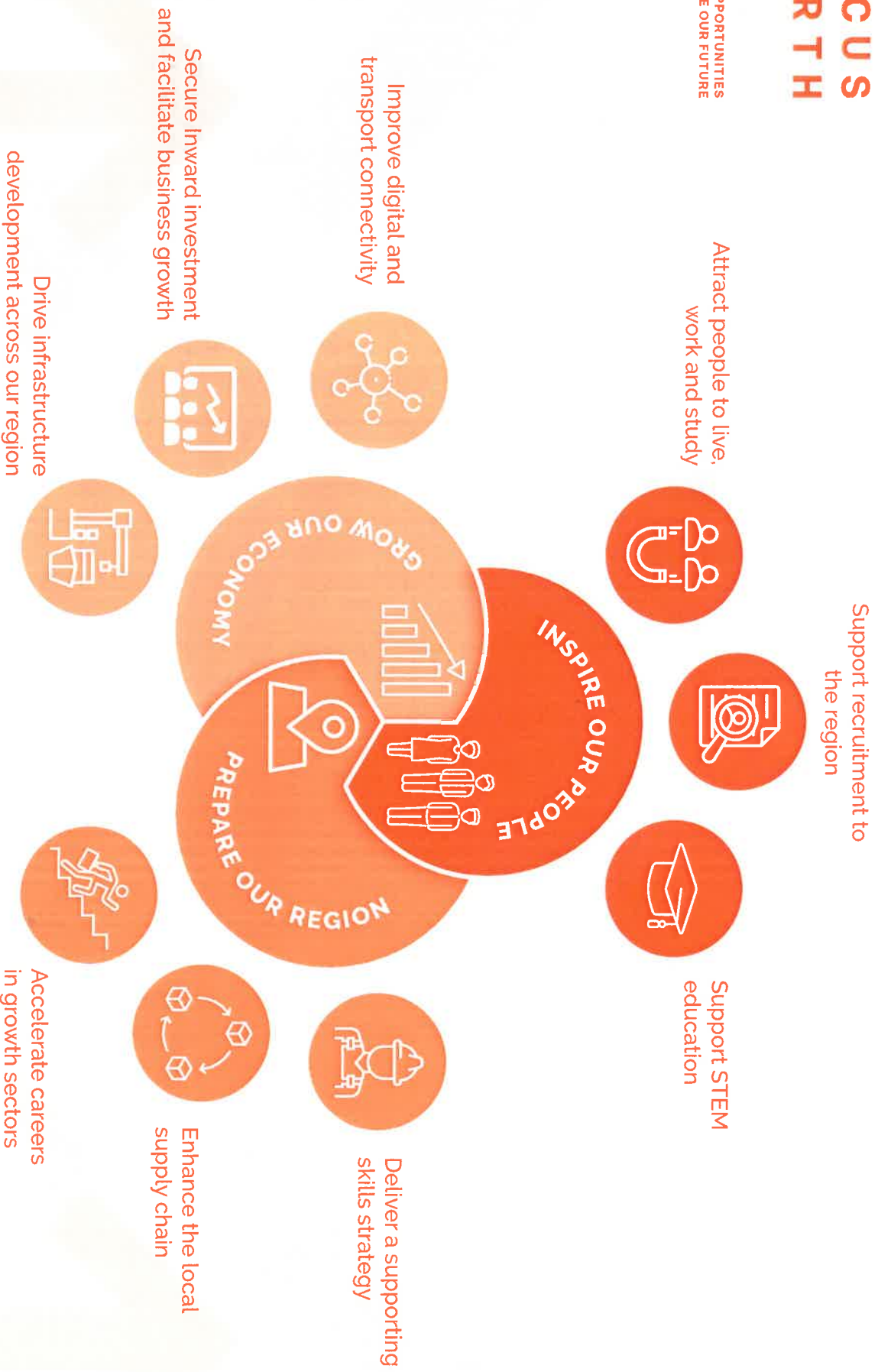
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