

**DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP
SOCIO ECONOMIC SUB GROUP**

Minutes of the DSG Socio Economic sub group meeting held on Wednesday 16 October 2024 at 1330 hours in the Thurso Ormlie Hub and Microsoft Teams.

Present:	David Alexander	Thurso and Wick Trades Council (chair)
	Roger Saxon	DSG Site Restoration sub group deputy chair
	Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
	Peter Faccenda	Programme Manager, Focus North
	Ryan MacLean	Trust Manager, Scrabster Harbour Trust
	Eann Sinclair	Area Manager, HIE
	Gillian Coghill	Buldoo Residents Group
	Cllr Michael Baird	Highland Council
	Ken Nicol	DSG Co-opted member of the public
In addition:	Tina Wrighton	Stakeholder & External Relations Manager, NRS Dounreay
	Magnus Davidson	Socio Economics Manager, NRS Dounreay
	Jeremy Gilmour	Head of Community & Economic Development, NDA
	Dawn Clasper	DSG Minute Secretary, NRS Dounreay
	David James	NRS Dounreay Graduate (socio economics)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

David Alexander welcomed attendees to the meeting. He welcomed Ryan MacLean, Scrabster Harbour Trust and David James, NRS Dounreay, to their first sub-group.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Ron Gunn, CHAT
- Debbie Miller, UHI North, West and Hebrides
- John Deighan, DSG Co-opted member of the public
- Cllr Struan Mackie, Highland Council (DSG Chair)

David Alexander noted that there were a number of lapsed members of the sub group. He notified that the DSG business meeting would write to lapsed members of the DSG sub group, not in regular attendance or submitting apologies, reminding the requirement of attendance and ability to nominate a deputy if required.

ACTION: DSG/SESG(2024)M03/A01: DSG Business meeting to write to absent members of the DSG Socio Economic sub group.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

David Alexander noted that the minutes of the last meeting - DSG/SESG(2024)M002, July 2024 – had been endorsed at the public meeting held in September 2024. He invited members to raise any issues from the minutes. No issues were raised.

4. STATUS OF ACTIONS

David Alexander noted that the status of actions had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. Of note:

- DSG/BM(2024)M010/A01: David Alexander to write to David Calder, Head of Sustainability and Socio Economics, NRS Dounreay regarding the use of the Viewfirth land owned by NDA. **Ongoing:** Email was sent to David Calder on 03/09/24. Further dialogue to take place.

Magnus Davidson provided an update that the NDA land and estates representatives have been invited to contribute to discussions off the back of the correspondence, with David Calder progressing the action, with an update to be provided in due course.

- DSG/SRSG(2024)M002/A005 – Rolls-Royce to provide details of the flexible working policy and to provide the gender balance statistics. **Complete**
- DSG/BM(2024)M007/A002: Focus North advisory board to share information focussed on Third sector and community organisations including the DSG. **Closed:** Peter Faccenda noted that due to resource challenges this action will be closed and addressed separately.

David Alexander commended that the majority of the actions have now been closed due to the DSG Business meeting fortnightly and the effort of the stakeholder relations team.

5. DOUNREAY COMMUNITY FUND REQUESTS

David Alexander noted that the Community Fund report has been circulated in advance. He reminded members to declare an interest if there was any involvement from members in these projects.

Funding applications were reviewed, decisions and further clarifications were agreed on for each application.

6. DOUNREAY SOCIO ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

David Alexander stated that a written update had been provided – DSG/SESG(2024)P022. Magnus Davidson, Socio Economic Manager, was invited to provide key highlights from the paper.

- The Dounreay Socio Economic Annual Review is expected to be published in Q3, with the sub group having already been provided much of the information included in the review, in previous meetings.
- NRS Dounreay have developed a new draft socio economic strategy. The publication of the draft had been deferred to align with Group Key Target requirements for 2024/25 and was expected to be published in early 2024/2025. However, there was a delay to awarding of a contract to support the NRS Sites plan, of which Dounreay wished to align in relevant areas. The work has now commenced and will inform refinement of the draft Dounreay strategy. The DSG will be consulted as part of this process with input from last year's NDA consultation also included.

- Work has recommenced on socio economic benefits realisation of the new lifetime plan. The social impact consultant and socio economic team have been finalising the socio economic elements of the benefits register. NRS Dounreay are aiming to present this to the socio economic sub group in January 2025.
- NRS Dounreay continue to work with different groups under its socio economic grant funding programme, with funding being agreed in the previous quarter for:
 - FR-000002360 Industrial Caithness (Sidh Chailleann Art) £12,010
 - FR-000002497 North Coast Visitor Centre (Highlife Highland) £265,000
 - FR-000002433 Melness Church Purchase (Melness Crofters Estate) £1,000
 - FR-000002438 Cala Sona Business Plan (Melness Crofters Estate) £1,250
 - FR-000002420 Scottish Surfing Championships (Scottish Surfing Federation) £10,000
 - FR-000002434 Taste North Food and Drink Festival (Venture North) £10,000
 - FR-000002499 Community Plan and Delivery (Thurso Community Development Trust) £200,000

David Alexander asked if this was a new three year funding request for the North Coast Visitor Centre (NCVC). Magnus Davidson confirmed that this was a new request as the previous three year funding programme had now come to an end.

David Alexander asked if there was discussion previously that Dounreay funding not be continued after the project.

Magnus Davidson noted that Dounreay had funded the centre when it was operating as Caithness Horizons, until it ceased operations due to financial challenges. Subsequently Dounreay supported the reopening of the centre under the NCVC name, alongside the Highland Council, and operated by High Life Highland under a new three year programme. This has now come to an end.

Both Dounreay and the Highland Council recognise the value of the centre to the local community and visitors alike and have agreed to funding going forward for another three years. He noted the visitor number increases showed the success of the centre, however the sustainability of centres like this is reliant on funding being found, and with the inclusion of the Dounreay exhibition and its wider benefit, it aligned well with the aims of the funding programme. Magnus Davidson noted that although funding had been agreed by Dounreay, the value of award required it to also go before the OneNDA panel.

Gillian Coghill stated that having the Dounreay exhibition off site and in the centre of the town increases the foot fall for local businesses.

- UK Subsidy Control Regime remains a risk to NRS Dounreay's socio economic programme and increased staff resource is being utilised to adapt to the new legislation, along with close partnership working with other public authorities in the area.

Eann Sinclair noted that this is also a significant issue for HIE, and that there is collaboration through the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership in creating a new scheme to easier facilitate support, of which Dounreay is contributing.

- Recruitment continues to be carefully managed. Interviews have been held for the intake of nine Health Physics Surveyor trainees for 2025. The new cohort of graduate and apprentices have started in the previous quarter. Emily Kearn, NRS Dounreay Sustainability Manager has left her position to take up employment with SEPA, Anna Turlewicz, an internal hire has replaced her as the Sustainability Manager.
- Janet Ashdown non-executive director of the NDA board visited site and was welcoming of advancements seen across sustainability at Dounreay, of which socio economics is a key driver.

David Alexander raised concern at the number of vacancies arising and asked why the supply chain was not being used to meet demand. Eann Sinclair agreed with David Alexander and noted that clients of HIE were communicating the loss of workforce to the site whilst the supply chain were concerned around uncertainty of work.

Trudy Morris asked how easy Dounreay were recruiting and are the posts being advertised being filled. She noted that there is an issue that businesses are competing for the same workers, and businesses should also be targeting bringing in workforce to the area.

Tina Wrighton answered that it was not easy for Dounreay to recruit for certain posts and readvertisement of posts is required at times. Magnus Davidson agreed and highlighted underlying demographic and labour market conditions. He noted that depopulation and an ageing population is reducing the current availability of working age people with the employment base shrinking. He highlighted that there is often discussion around future projections showing population decline, however historic and ongoing population decline, and ageing, is impacting the current ability to hire across the business community, due to a much reduced working age population compared to even ten years ago. He highlighted Dounreay managed NDA funding of the Talent Attraction initiative delivered through the Caithness Chamber of Commerce as one measure aimed at reversing this trend.

Ken Nicol commended the early careers work and asked if there was an issue with retention after completing their apprenticeship and graduate programmes. Magnus Davidson highlighted that he had requested retention information from the relevant department last year and the numbers show that retention appears to be very good.

Gillian Coghill asked whether plans from government to ban zero hours contracts would impact NRS Dounreay. Magnus Davidson responded that he would need to request that information from Human Resources.

ACTION: DSG/SESG(2024)M03/A001: Magnus Davidson to request from HR if NRS Dounreay would be impacted by changes to law on zero hours contracts.

Jeremy Gilmore noted the NDA Socio Economic annual report has now been published.

In addition, the guidance for applicants to apply to the socio economic programme was being redrafted to make it easier for applicants.

David Alexander thanked Magnus Davidson and Jeremy Gilmour for their updates.

7. FOCUS NORTH UPDATE

David Alexander noted that a written update had been provided – DSG/SESG(2024)P023. He invited Peter Faccenda to provide key highlights from the paper.

The following update was provided by Peter Faccenda who noted that the report contained further information:

- A major milestone has been met in the successful inscription of the Flow Country as a UNESCO World Heritage site in July, this is a potential tourism opportunity to highlight the profile of the area.
- The Focus North Industry Forum, co-chaired by Dounreay and the West of Orkney Windfarm is currently undertaking work to collaborate on industry skills and training requirements over the next five to ten years.
- A new cohort of local SMEs is undertaking a Net-Zero Nation Accelerator programme to help remove carbon from their business activity. The programme is being supported by NDA funding managed by Dounreay.
- All of the Future Skills apprenticeship programme funding has now been allocated. The funding is managed by the Caithness Business Fund with support from the NDA, Dounreay, and the West of Orkney Wind Farm.
- In September, peatland restoration training was rolled out to 7 local crofters. A second cohort is being run in November funded directly by NatureScot. The training is aimed at enabling local skills to capitalise on the pipeline of peatland restoration projects in the area. The Peatland Partnership and its subsidiary Flow Country Restoration Ltd continue to develop peatland restoration initiatives.
- HIE is leading on space cluster development activities. A benefit realisation document has been prepared by a third party for HIE. A visitor management plan has now been developed for the spaceport.
- A dedicated working group has been created to develop a long-term plan for Wick Airport and the PSO.
- Plans are now being discussed for the 2025 Focus North Conference.

Gillian Coghill noted that she was very happy to see that seven local crofters have undertaken peatland training. She also welcomed wider initiatives at peatland restoration and carbon markets in the area.

Peter Faccenda noted that peatland carbon market is still a relatively small market compared to carbon sales from tree planting. As such initiatives here are aimed at developing the skills alongside the industry and community benefit.

David Alexander asked if the apprenticeship programme was only for one year. Trudy Morris gave background to the history of the fund and the apprenticeship programmes and highlighted that this new initiative was support for the full apprenticeship period of three years.

Ken Nicol asked how this fund corresponded to skills shortages identified elsewhere in discussion. Magnus Davidson responded that the aim of this fund was in part to train the skills requirements for the future within the supply chain. He also noted that Dounreay has an in house apprenticeship and trainee programme helping to address these skills shortages from a Dounreay perspective.

Gillian Coghill commended the apprenticeship funding and suggested that the pipeline of battery storage and other energy developments could contribute funds. She highlighted the importance of retaining skilled young people in the area. Eann Sinclair stated the importance of engaging with developers at the appropriate time for initiatives like this.

David Alexander noted the space industry opportunities and asked how the public and business community can engage with the activities.

Eann Sinclair highlighted a range of events and opportunities to engage and gave some further updates on spaceport construction and space cluster activity.

David Alexander thanked Peter Faccenda for his update.

8. CORRESPONDENCE SINCE LAST MEETING

David Alexander noted that there was correspondence for this reporting period.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

David Alexander opened this to members there was no other business from members.

- David Alexander noted that he and Cllr Struan Mackie had attended the NDA Summit in Manchester.
- Magnus Davidson noted that it is his intention to bring the socio economics benefit realisation work to the January socio economic subgroup.

10. CLOSE

There being no further business David Alexander thanked everyone for their input and formally closed the meeting.

David Alexander
DSG Socio Economic Sub Group Chair
25 October 2024

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

DSG/SESG(2024)M03/A01: DSG Business meeting to write to absent members of the DSG Socio Economic sub group.

OFFICIAL

Endorsed on 4 December 2024

ACTION: DSG/SESG(2024)M03/A001: Magnus Davidson to request from HR if NRS Dounreay would be impacted by changes to law on zero hours contracts.