

**The Highland Council**

**Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee  
18 November 2013**

Agenda Item	<b>4.</b>
Report No	<b>CS 36/13</b>

## **North Highland Onshore Vision – Action Plan Update**

### **Report by Director of Planning and Development**

#### **Summary**

The purpose of the North Highland Onshore Vision is to identify key land use planning actions which will help to support the growth of the marine renewables sector in North Highland. As part of this, the Highland Council agreed a 10 point action plan in May 2011 which was developed in consultation with a variety of stakeholders. The action plan sets out a framework for delivering support for the sector by providing actions, together with timescales, the lead agency and some of the other key partners involved.

An annual update, setting out revised actions, was agreed by the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee in November 2012. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress made during 2013 and asks Members to agree the revised version of the Action Plan for the coming year.

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The marine renewables sector – covering wave, tidal and offshore wind energy – is expected to expand significantly in the Caithness and North Sutherland area over the next 20 years. The National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) Main Issues Report (2013) continued to identify the Pentland Firth as an ‘area for co-ordinated action’ and the Council is promoting the potential economic benefits and employment opportunities that this sector will bring to the area. This is reflected as a key priority for the Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership, of which the Highland Council is a partner. The designation of the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters as Scotland’s first Marine Energy Park should provide further stimulus to the sector and make the area more attractive for inward investment.
- 1.2 The Planning Environment and Development (PED) Committee, at its meeting in May 2011, agreed a 10 point action plan which focussed primarily on the land use planning of onshore development associated with the marine renewables sector in North Highland. An updated version was agreed by Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee in November 2012.
- 1.3 A further updated version of the 10-point action plan is attached to this report as Appendix 1 for consideration. It sets out a framework for delivery by

providing timescales, the lead agency and some of the other key partners involved. Updates on progress with the actions are reported on a frequent basis to the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Leadership Forum and through the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership.

## **2. Action Plan Progress**

- 2.1 Progress has been made on a number of the actions set out in the Action Plan and updates for all actions are documented in Appendix 1. The following provides some further information, particularly regarding the linkage to other development planning work of the Council.
- 2.2 Following the call for sites exercise (Action 2) undertaken in late 2012 which focused exclusively on seeking suggestions of sites which could be developed for employment uses to support the marine renewables industry, initial analysis was undertaken of the suggestions received and outline information was published on the Council website. Information about sites in Wick and Thurso was fed in to the charrettes held in the towns in February 2013. The site suggestions are now being taken forward through the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan). The aspiration for the area to embrace economic opportunity is clear, as is the need to plan carefully for it. As part of CaSPlan preparation, each site suggestion will be subject to strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and the Council will come to a view on which sites it prefers.
- 2.3 For Delivering Development (Action 4), we can report that a recent and very useful liaison meeting was held in August between planning officers of The Highland Council, Orkney Islands Council and Marine Scotland, with a focus on delivering marine renewables. It is intended to hold such meetings regularly, on a quarterly basis. Through this we are sharing experience and practice, discussing day-to-day working arrangements for dealing with developments in the coastal zone and for the relationship between marine and terrestrial planning, and on siting and design issues. We will continue to work on these issues together during 2014. In terms of siting and design guidance, in North Highland there is likely to be a particular focus on planning for infrastructure in the coastal zone, in existing infrastructure corridors and for hubs (whereas on the Orkney Islands there is likely to be greater need, in addition, for entirely new infrastructure corridors to be identified).
- 2.4 Turning to Masterplans for Scrabster/ Thurso West (Action 6) and for Wick Harbour and Lower Pulteneytown (Action 7), outline information about the aspirations of the harbours and their plans together with information about opportunities for nearby properties was fed into the Wick and Thurso charrettes. This provided opportunity in each case for these to be discussed within the context of community aspirations for the town as a whole; there was consensus that the harbours have a key part to play in the towns' future and an understanding that this would require development. There remains value in teasing out detailed issues as we go forward with CaSPlan, to ensure that what we include for the harbours in the Proposed Plan is sufficient and robust and, if necessary, is supplemented by additional guidance. There is therefore

a tie-in with the timetable for CaSPlan for exploring the specific issues further and consulting on them.

### **3. Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)**

3.1 The North Highland Onshore Vision work is feeding in to preparation of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan). Marine renewables and related opportunities will play a major role in this plan.

3.2 Work formally commenced on CaSPlan itself in early 2013 and early stages have been as follows:

1. Beginning preparation of the Monitoring Statement;
2. Charrettes for Wick and Thurso were held in February 2013, the Final Charrettes Report brought to Area Committee in May 2013 and follow-on meetings held with the communities in June 2013;
3. A general Call for Sites and Ideas for CaSPlan was held 23 August to 17 October 2013.

3.3 The next steps include:

1. Assessing the Call for Sites and Ideas suggestions, and feeding in the Charrette outcomes;
2. Completing preparation of the Monitoring Statement;
3. Preparation of and consultation on a Main Issues Report;
4. Preparation of and consultation on a Proposed Plan.

3.4 In preparing CaSPlan we are aiming to focus it on the delivery of specific outcomes. We are therefore looking carefully at the Single Outcome Agreement, the Council's Programme and outcomes sought by other partners, discussing these with them in order to be clear on shared outcomes and to identify key outcomes for CaSPlan itself.

3.5 Our intention is to bring a report on draft contents for the Main Issues Report to the next meeting of the Area Committee in February 2014 for consideration.

### **4. Fit with the Programme for the Highland Council 2012 – 2017**

4.1 The work outlined in this report contributes to several commitments within the Council's Programme 'Working Together for the Highlands'. It helps to provide a comprehensive sustainable economic growth strategy based around the renewables sector for the area including supporting Scrabster Enterprise Area and the area's ports. The work also contributes to the Council's Single Outcome Agreement commitment to align with national outcomes for making the area an attractive place to do business, help fulfil its economic potential, create better employment opportunities and contribute to a better educated and skilled workforce.

## **5 Resource implications**

- 5.1 The North Highland Onshore Vision Action Plan was approved by PED committee in May 2011 and as such the work streams are provided for in our programme and budgets.

## **6 Equality implications**

- 6.1 An EqIA Screening will be undertaken for the Local Development Plan and Supplementary Guidance documents which are to be prepared.

## **7 Climate Change and Carbon Clever implications**

- 7.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will be carried out to assess any policy and site options identified in the CaSPlan Main Issues Report, including for each site submitted as part of the call for sites. A core part of this assessment is to consider the impact on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

## **8 Legal and Risk implications**

- 8.1 Our local development plans and supplementary guidance will be produced in accordance with statutory requirements.

## **9 Conclusions**

- 9.1 The North Highland Onshore Vision is a key piece of work in maximising the onshore benefits in Caithness and North Sutherland from the anticipated expansion of marine renewables. The Action Plan is a valuable tool as it sets out 10 particular projects and outlines the lead agent, important partners, and target dates for completion. This report presents an updated version of the action plan to highlight progress made, current status, and agree revised target dates.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee is invited to:

- 1) Note the progress made to deliver the actions which are set out in the Action Plan over the past 12 months;
- 2) Agree the revised Action Plan which sets out updated targets and timescales for the coming year; and
- 3) Agree that a further report be presented to this committee in February 2014 on draft contents for the Main Issues Report.

Signature:

Designation:

Date: 7 November 2013

Authors: Douglas Chisholm, Graduate Planner (01463 702262)

Background Papers:

[Wick and Thurso Charrettes Final Report](#)

[The Crown Estate's Onshore Infrastructure Info Note](#)

[CaSPlan webpage](#)

## **NORTH HIGHLAND ONSHORE VISION: 10 POINT ACTION PLAN – NOVEMBER 2013**

## **Appendix 1**

This action plan focuses primarily on the land use planning of onshore development associated with the expected expansion of the marine renewables sector in North Highland. It has been developed by the Council in consultation with partners and includes both infrastructure and support industry requirements. As a result it will make a practical contribution towards ensuring a coordinated planning approach to the delivery of onshore development for the marine renewables industry in Caithness and North Sutherland.

The 10 key action points are set out in the table on the following page – **the actions shaded purple relate to the action plan which was approved in November 2012 and the points which are not shaded are the updated actions.**

<b><i>Action Plan – Approved in Nov 2012</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>Action Plan – Revised version November 2013</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>

The aim of the action plan is to provide a clear framework for delivery by showing timescales, who will drive forward pieces of work and other partners involved; however it does not attempt to list everyone that could ultimately be involved such as Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd (DSRL), Skills Development Scotland, Caithness Chamber of Commerce and the North Highland Initiative. The Council will seek agreement from partners that they will contribute to delivery of the actions.

The Council intends to finalise this Action Plan by working with partner organisations including Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership to ensure that the proposals fit well with their work streams and working arrangements.

Key:

THC	The Highland Council
HIE	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
OIC	Orkney Islands Council
Key Agencies	Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Transport Scotland, Historic Scotland
CNSRP	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
NDA	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
DSRL	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
SG	Scottish Government
CaSPlan	Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

	Action	Description	Lead Agency	Other Partners	Timescale	Current Status
1	Business and industrial land audit	Update and review the Caithness and North Sutherland Business and Industrial Land Audit for 2012.	THC	HIE	Late 2012	A summary audit has been prepared but work is required to complete and update the audit.
1	Business and industrial land audit	Update and review the Caithness and North Sutherland Business and Industrial Land Audit.	THC	HIE	Mid 2014	A summary audit was prepared in 2012, and information will be published in the CaSPlan Monitoring Statement. However it is likely that a new audit will be carried out across the Highland area in 2014.
2	Call for Sites	Carry out a "call for sites" exercise for business and industrial sites which will be capable of supporting the development of marine renewables and take forward through preparation of Supplementary Guidance.	THC	HIE Renewables industry Landowners Key Agencies	Late 2012	Call for Sites consultation was carried out between Aug and Oct 2012. Currently analysing results and preparing report for Committee.
2	Call for Sites	Carry out a "call for sites" exercise for business and industrial sites which may be capable of supporting the development of marine renewables and take forward for consideration through preparation of CaSPlan.	THC	HIE Renewables industry Landowners Key Agencies	Spring/ Summer 2014 (CaSPlan Main Issues Report)	Call for Sites consultation was carried out between August and October 2012. Site suggestions received have been published on Council website. These sites will be taken forward for consideration through preparation of CaSPlan.

3	Enterprise Areas	Work closely with Scottish Government on the implementation of a marine-renewable related Enterprise Area in Caithness (or as part of a Highland-wide Renewables Zone).	HIE	THC SG CNSRP NDA DSRL	Summer 2012 onwards	Scottish Government established Scrabster as an Enterprise Area in summer 2012. HIE and THC are continuing to work with Scrabster Harbour Trust to assist their progress.
3	Enterprise Areas	Work closely with Scottish Government to progress Scrabster Low Carbon & Renewables Enterprise Area.	HIE	THC SG CNSRP NDA DSRL	Ongoing	Scottish Government established Scrabster as an Enterprise Area in summer 2012. HIE and THC are continuing to work with Scrabster Harbour Trust to facilitate development of the Enterprise Area. A feasibility study for the road access is nearing completion.
4	Delivering Development	<p>Continued use and promotion of the pre-application advice service.</p> <p>Efficient determination of planning applications through the use of Processing Agreements and agreed timelines for delivery.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities for joint working arrangements with Orkney Islands Council/ sharing of expertise and resources.</p> <p>Implement the protocol for handling planning applications for small businesses.</p> <p>Pursue high speed broadband provision to support economic growth</p>	<p>THC</p> <p>HIE (broadband)</p>	<p>Key Agencies OIC Developers CNSRP NDA DSRL Broadband provider</p>	2011 onwards	<p>Progress is continuing to be made to improve the efficiency of the planning process for applications relating to the marine renewables sector. THC is working with OIC to prepare a Marine Spatial Plan and for the National Planning Framework 3.</p> <p>Ongoing negotiations with broadband providers with a contract expected to be awarded by end of 2012 and the rollout commencing in early 2013</p>



## 4 Delivering Development

Continued use and promotion of the pre-application advice service.

Efficient determination of planning applications through the use of Processing Agreements and agreed timelines for delivery.

Investigate opportunities for joint working arrangements with Orkney Islands Council/ sharing of expertise and resources.

Implement the protocol for handling planning applications for small businesses.

Pursue high speed broadband provision to support economic growth

**THC**

**HIE** (broadband)

Key Agencies

OIC

Developers

CNSRP

NDA

DSRL

Broadband provider

Ongoing

Progress is continuing to be made to improve the efficiency of the planning process for applications relating to the marine renewables sector. THC is working with OIC and Marine Scotland to prepare a Marine Spatial Plan; Issues and Options Consultation was held in summer 2013. THC have succeeded in promoting 'Orkney, Pentland Firth and North Caithness' as an 'Area of Coordinated Action' in National Planning Framework 3's Main Issues Report. THC and OIC planning officers have begun regular liaison meetings with a focus on delivering marine renewables.

HIE awarded roll-out contract to BT. Caithness/ N Sutherland Exchanges not included in initial roll-out communities. Indications that Caithness exchanges may be enabled early 2015. N Sutherland exchanges may not be enabled until 2016.

5	<b>Siting and Design Guidance</b>	<p>Draft Supplementary Guidance to address the location, siting and design considerations of the onshore requirements related to marine renewable energy developments.</p> <p>Pursue potential for joint working with Orkney Islands Council on broad siting and design principles.</p>	THC	HIE OIC Key Agencies	Early/ Summer 2013	Re-scheduled to begin in early to mid 2013
5	<b>Siting and Design Guidance</b>	<p>Draft Supplementary Guidance to address the location, siting and design considerations of the onshore requirements related to marine renewable energy developments.</p> <p>Pursue potential for joint working with Orkney Islands Council on broad siting and design principles.</p>	THC	HIE OIC Key Agencies	Mid 2014 (draft guidance)	The Crown Estate has published an onshore infrastructure information note which raises awareness, in broad terms, of likely infrastructure requirements. Initial work has been carried out on siting and design issues; we are discussing this and sharing knowledge with OIC and it will be further developed in 2014.
6	<b>Masterplan for Scrabster/ Thurso West</b>	Provide an updated development framework for Scrabster and West Thurso, taking into account recent development and infrastructure constraints.	THC	HIE SG Landowners Scrabster Harbour Trust Key Agencies	Early 2013	Brief has been prepared for the masterplan. This will be taken forward through a whole-town charrette for Thurso which will inform the Caithness and Sutherland LDP.
6	<b>Masterplan for Scrabster/ Thurso West</b>	Provide an updated development framework for Scrabster and West Thurso, taking into account recent development and infrastructure constraints.	THC	HIE SG Landowners Scrabster Harbour Trust Key Agencies	Mid 2014 (CaSPlan Main Issues Report)	Some of the key issues were taken forward through a whole-town charrette for Thurso carried out in February 2013. The outcomes will inform the CaSPlan and any accompanying Supplementary Guidance required.

7	<b>Masterplan for Wick Harbour and Lower Pulteneytown</b>	Provide an updated development framework for Wick Harbour and Lower Pulteneytown, taking into account recent development, regeneration opportunities and infrastructure constraints.	THC	HIE SG Key Agencies Landowners Wick Harbour Authority	Early 2013	Brief has been prepared for the masterplan. This will be taken forward through a whole-town charrette for Wick which will inform the Caithness and Sutherland LDP.
7	<b>Masterplan for Wick Harbour and Lower Pulteneytown</b>	Provide an updated development framework for Wick Harbour and Lower Pulteneytown, taking into account recent development, regeneration opportunities and infrastructure constraints.	THC	HIE SG Key Agencies Landowners Wick Harbour Authority	Mid 2014 (CaSPlan Main Issues Report)	Some of the key issues were taken forward through a whole-town charrette for Wick carried out in February 2013. The outcomes will inform the CaSPlan and any accompanying Supplementary Guidance required.
8	<b>Community Benefit</b>	Deliver Community Benefits from marine renewables for North Highland in line with Highland Council community benefit policy.	THC	Developers	Early 2013 (policy)/2017 (delivery)	THC has produced policy; detail for implementation for offshore is still being developed. Actual community benefit delivery is not expected until 2017.
8	<b>Community Benefit</b>	Deliver Community Benefits from marine renewables for North Highland in line with Highland Council community benefit policy.	THC	Developers	Early 2013 (policy)/2017 (delivery)	THC has now agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with a major tidal energy provider for the delivery of Community Benefit from the Pentland Firth beyond 2017. Further work is now required on the signing of a Minute of Agreement with this provider. Community Benefit from off-shore wind developments remains a challenge but discussion is on-going with developers.

9	<b>Housing Demand Assessment</b>	An audit of projected housing needs to meet demand from marine energy, offshore wind and grid upgrades to include analysis of the type and tenure required and location preference.	<b>THC</b>	HIE	Late 2012 onwards	A full housing needs and demand assessment is expected to be carried out for the lead up of the review of the Highland-wide LDP. In the interim a briefing note will be prepared summarising the information which is available and the key conclusions. This will inform the Caithness and Sutherland LDP.
9	<b>Housing Demand Assessment</b>	An audit of projected housing needs to meet demand from marine energy, offshore wind and grid upgrades to include analysis of the type and tenure required and location preference.	<b>THC</b>	HIE	Ongoing	A full housing needs and demand assessment is expected to be carried out for the lead up of the review of the Highland-wide LDP. In the interim a briefing note has been prepared summarising the information which is available and the key conclusions. This will inform CaSPlan and will be included in the Monitoring Statement for the Plan.
10	<b>Promotion of Caithness and North Sutherland</b>	Targeted marketing to support potential investment in the energy sector.	<b>HIE</b>	THC Caithness Chamber of Commerce CNSRP	Ongoing	A number of initiatives have been or are being carried out to support and promote investment. Particularly noteworthy is the creation of the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Energy Park.
10	<b>Promotion of Caithness and North Sutherland</b>	Targeted marketing to support potential investment in the energy sector.	<b>HIE</b>	THC Caithness Chamber of Commerce CNSRP	Ongoing	A number of initiatives have been or are being carried out to support and promote investment. Particularly noteworthy is the creation of the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Energy Park. CNSRP events being held in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and London to reach key influencers with message regarding opportunities in the area.