

Agenda Item	<b>9.</b>
Report No	<b>SCC/22/21</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Sutherland County Committee

**Date:** 22 November 2021

**Report Title:** Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination – Update

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the background and the progress being made on the Flow Country World Heritage Site Nomination.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

### 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - there are no additional resource implication arising out of this report. The bid process is already supported by a Project Officer, a post co-funded by Nature Scot, RSPB, Wildland Ltd and The Highland Council.
- 3.2 **Legal** - there are no legal obligations arising from this report. Any additional future legal liability would depend on what further involvement The Highland Council seeks in respect of the site, once inscribed, and would be governed by a separate agreement.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - There are no direct Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications arising from this report. However, completion of the nomination pack which, if accepted and approved, will lead to achieving UNESCO World Heritage Status for Caithness and Sutherland, an international accolade for Highland, which would undoubtedly attract future investment and safeguard a site of local and international importance.

- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - Climate change and biodiversity are inextricably linked. Securing UNESCO World Heritage status will help safeguard this internationally important peatland site for the benefit of both biodiversity and carbon sequestration and result in positive action in tackling the global climate and ecological emergency.
- 3.5 **Risk** – Failure to deliver the bid in time may negatively impact the organisation’s reputation and the Council’s commitment to the declared climate and ecological emergency. The nomination folder needs to be completed and with DCMS by September 2022, for onward delivery to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Spring 2023.

Working towards this Status aligns closely with the stated aims of the Council’s climate and ecological emergency i.e., safeguarding our natural heritage and repositioning Highland as a low CO<sup>2</sup> region.

- 3.6 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

## 4 Background

- 4.1 The Flow Country peatland, which stretches across Caithness and Sutherland in the north of Scotland, is progressing towards inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Flow Country is being nominated on the basis of the world class nature of the blanket bog environments it contains (criteria ix: ongoing ecological and biological processes) and the biodiversity they sustain (criteria x: natural habitats and biological diversity).
- 4.2 If successful, the Flow Country will join the likes of the Great Barrier Reef and the Grand Canyon as natural World Heritage Sites and the region will be able to take advantage of this accolade through the educational, environmental, social and economic benefits it can bring.

## 5 Progress

- 5.1 The application for World Heritage Status requires the submission of a detailed dossier and management plan for the proposed site. For the proposed Flow Country World Heritage site these will ultimately be submitted to UNESCO towards the end of 2022, with a decision taken by mid-2024. The dossier comprises a detailed description of the proposed Site, highlighting its Outstanding Universal Value; a justification of its global significance; its state of conservation; the protective and management measures in place and what monitoring will be undertaken to ensure it continues to be a resource for future generations to draw upon. To provide some indication of the scale of the nomination dossier and the detail required, a good example (Ningaloo Coast, Western Australia) can be accessed through the following link:  
<https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1369.pdf>

The compilation of the nomination dossier is being led by a project coordinator based at the Highland Council (Steven Andrews) and input is being drawn from across a partnership including NatureScot, RSPB, UHI, Wildland Ltd, who are amongst the wider Steering Group which also includes community, landowner and business representatives. This group, along with an associated Technical Working Group, has been formalised to provide a longer term, post-inscription management structure.

- 5.2 Significant progress has been made on defining a draft boundary, which is key in the description of the site. This is now complete and undergoing peer review and will form the backbone of consultation in the coming months. Alongside work on the boundary a workshop, engaging with leading experts, has helped further define the attributes that we feel the site can be nominated for, now including its role in the sequestration and storage of carbon and its importance to the riverine habitats which are sourced within the site. Progress is being made on the other chapters which we hope to be completed by the end of the year. A consultant, engaged through the project, is leading the development of a management plan for the site.
- 5.3 Consultation undertaken during the technical evaluation (the first hurdle in progressing the World Heritage bid) indicated broad local support for the project. To maintain engagement during the early stages of the dossier preparation press coverage has been sought and presentations have been given widely to a broad range of groups - Highland Council committees, conferences (including COP 26), landowners and community groups. As the draft nomination dossier is nearing completion, consultation will become a major focus of the project with maildrops, online forums and face-to-face drop-in sessions planned to ensure the project is further shaped by the communities which live and work in and around the site.

Further information, updates on progress, and information on future consultation can be found on our website: <https://www.theflowcountry.org.uk/>

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 3 November 2021

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