

DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP SOCIO ECONOMIC SUB GROUP

Minutes of the DSG Socio Economic Sub Group meeting held on Wednesday 21 January 2026 at 1330 hours in the Orlig meeting room, Dounreay Public Information office and Microsoft Teams.

Present:	David Alexander (DA)	Thurso and Wick Trades Council (chair)
	Donna Chambers (DC)	Deputy Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
	Cllr Struan Mackie (SM)	Highland Council (DSG chair)
	David Broughton (DB)	DSG Co-opted member of the public
	Gillian Coghill (GC)	Buldoo Residents Group
	Peter Faccenda (PF)	Programme Manager, Focus North
	Alan Scott (AS)	DSG Co-opted member of the public
	Cllr Janet McEwan (JM)	Highland Council
	Ryan Mclean (RM)	Scrabster Harbour Trust

In addition:

Magnus Davidson (MD)	Socio Economics Manager, NRS Dounreay
Jeremy Gilmour (JG)	Head of Community & Economic Development, NDA
Hannah Sutherland (HS)	NRS Dounreay Senior Socio Economics Administrator
Tina Wrighton (TW)	NRS Dounreay Stakeholder & External Relations Manager
Dion Tan (DT)	NRS Dounreay
Finlay MacDonald (FM)	Highland Council

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

David Calder (DC)	Head of Sustainability & Socio Economics, NRS Dounreay
John Deighan (JD)	DSG Co-opted member of the public
Ken Nicol (KN)	DSG Co-opted member of the public
Sandy Mackie (SM)	DSG Co-opted member of the public
Roger Saxon (RS)	DSG Site Restoration subgroup deputy chair
Trudy Morris (TM)	Chief Executive, North Highland Chamber of Commerce
Cllr Raymond Bremner (RB)	Highland Council

2. WELCOME and Highland Council presentation

David Alexander welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the presence of new attendees, introductions were made.

DA invited Finlay MacDonald to give an update on Thurso Investment – Points of Delivery.

FM provided a presentation update on the HIP and opened the floor to any questions.

DA noted concerns around many towns and cities include run-down buildings such as shops and historic buildings and asked would the POD take people away from the main centre. FM answered that at the consultation stage people will have the opportunity to share their views, which will take place in June, on how best this can be mitigated

Gillian Coghill expressed her concerns around investment in towns and that the biggest problem will be accommodation and noted the issue of empty shops. GC questioned if the council and partners take forward the shops that are empty and make them into accommodations/offices. Peter Faccenda indicated Focus North partners are currently in the process of looking at accommodation and are looking at the different opportunities that includes empty buildings around the town.

A discussion then followed around accommodation challenges within Caithness and north Sutherland.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

David Alexander noted that the minutes of the last meeting approved at public meeting in December 2025. Taken as read.

4. ACTIONS

DSG/BM(2025)M011/A002: Code of conduct and declaration of interests to be formally documented and endorsed in the DSG Terms of Reference

Following NDA SSG review recommendations – action agreed – SM has shared words with business group for comment and eventual ratification by DSG members

DSG/BM(2025)M011/A003: DSG and Sellafeld SSGs to collaborate more closely
Agreed that this would be beneficial for both groups working with category 1 nuclear sites – joint meetings to be arranged – SM has shared a draft letter for comment

DSG/SESG(2025)M02/A01: Magnus to draft Terms of Reference for the Dounreay Communities Fund and share with DSG

Drafted and under review – circulated and comments made – will be circulated with subgroup papers for ratification. Amendments/DA comments to be made following subgroup

DSG/SRSG(2025)M03/A03: Following the RTC on 7 October - SM to bring together representatives from HC, NRS, Police Scotland, Buldoo, Vulcan and DSG to discuss road improvement options.

Email circulated by Struan following meeting – SM will follow-up HC representatives – Struan has chased HC reps several times – now with CEO of HC – SM to get a date in diaries w/c 26 January – no update provided at January subgroups

5. DOUNREAY COMMUNITY FUND REQUESTS

Magnus Davidson took members through the funding applications. It was also noted that, going forward, MD will guide members through Communities Fund applications having scored them to ensure that they meet the correct criteria.

A discussion then followed regarding each application for the DCF.

DOUNREAY SOCIO ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

DA invited MD to provide key highlights from the paper.

Highland Investment Plan: he referenced questions arising from the FM presentation and highlighted that Dounreay is working with partners on housing as part of wider modelling done on workforce requirements over the next 20 years. This includes assessing permanent and non-permanent roles across Caithness and North Sutherland, for Dounreay and other developments, which will increase demand for accommodation. Work is ongoing with the UHI and the council to consider the needs of graduates, students, and temporary workers. Options are being explored to refurbish derelict buildings and town-centre units into appropriate accommodation. Engagement with Skills Development Scotland has also highlighted housing needs.

Economic Impact: The NDA commissions an economic impact assessment every three years and has appointed PwC to undertake a major study. The report is expected by the end of the financial year. Early indications suggest Dounreay continues to have a significant and growing economic impact.

Grant funding: 75% is formally committed against 25/26 budget, with 100% plus additional drawdown from the NDA expected by end of the financial year. In the quarter, 2 projects were awarded and are referenced in the papers.

MD took the members through Q3 procurement figures. The application process for the new graduate cohort has now closed and the assessment centre is coming back to Caithness in February. The programme continues to attract high quality candidates from within and out with Caithness and north Sutherland.

Dounreay have 3 finalists in the National skills academy awards including the FutureSkills Programme run by the Caithness Business Fund.

There was little to report in STEM activity verbally as most activities ramp up in next quarter. Tina noted the mock interviews that were done with contribution from Dounreay staff.

MD opened the floor to any questions.

DA asked about the North coast visitor centre securing £75k for this year? MD said the funding ran out in October 2024 and the new funding deal with Highlife Highland is for 3 years and with the £75k committed to the new opening hours, additional funding was provided last year to keep the facility open to the wider public during the winter.

A discussion followed around housing concerns.

Alan Scott highlighted that local companies can't compete with Dounreay's terms and conditions. A discussion followed about the concerns. An action followed from this discussion for a meeting to take place with Alan and his representatives from the local business base **DSG/SESG(2026)M004/A01**. MD asked for an action to be recorded that a meeting to be set up to discuss these concerns with AS and wider business representatives.

Jeremy Gilmour gave the following update from NDA:

Economic Impact and Funding: Economic impact data is currently being reviewed to ensure it is appropriate for its intended use. Joint funding for projects with Dounreay, including graduate and apprentice recruitment, has been secured before the end of the financial year. The budget for the current year is fully committed

6. FOCUS NORTH UPDATE

DA invited Peter Faccenda to provide key highlights from the paper.

The Innovation Business Plan remains in development. A programme of engagement with young people is ongoing to raise awareness of future opportunities, including a Minecraft competition scheduled for completion by mid-February. Flights have restarted between Wick and Aberdeen, through Air Charter Scotland, with a contract in place until the end of March and funding hoping to be secured to extend services until August. Peatland restoration activity continues to progress, with potential investment anticipated within the next few months as the programme expands. The Just Transition Commission is expected to return on 19 February to launch the Caithness report. The position of Independent Chair remains vacant.

7. CORRESPONDENCE SINCE LAST MEETING

N/A

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Struan Mackie noted that in the recent SSG review, there was a request to ensure when an individual represents an SSG at an external event, that they have the endorsement of the SSG members. He therefore requested endorsement from the group to attend an external event. The group agreed.

Tina Wrighton informed the members of the supply chain event tomorrow 22 Jan 2026 at 1pm held online.

Donna Chambers encouraged members to look at the new Live North website and social media accounts. [Live North - Helping you move and find Jobs in Highlands](#)

9. CLOSE

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

DAVID ALEXANDER
DSG Socio Economic Subgroup Chair

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

DSG/SESG(2026)M004/A01 : Magnus Davidson to arrange for a meeting to take place with Alan and his representatives from the local business base.