

Endorsed on 21 January 2025

DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP BUSINESS MEETING

Minutes of DSG Business Meeting held on Tuesday 17 December 2024 at 0930 via MS Teams.

Present:	Cllr Struan Mackie	DSG Chair
	David Alexander	DSG Vice-chair & Socio Economic sub group chair
	Gillian Coghill	DSG Site Restoration sub group chair
	Peter Faccenda	DSG Socio Economic sub group deputy chair
	Roger Saxon	DSG Site Restoration sub group deputy chair
	Dawn Clasper	DSG Minute Secretary
	Tina Wrighton	Stakeholder & External Relations Manager, NRS Dounreay

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Cllr Struan Mackie welcomed everyone to the meeting, he thanked members for their attendance and their contributions throughout the year.

No apologies have been received.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Cllr Struan Mackie noted that the minutes of the last meeting – DSG/BM(2024)M015, 26 November 2024 – were endorsed by members. Members agreed this was a true reflection of the meeting. These would now be circulated to all DSG members for their information.

3. ACTION STATUS

Dawn Clasper noted there were a small number of ongoing actions. Discussion focused on:

- 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** - David Alexander met with David Calder on 2 December who will provide a formal written response to the DSG BM with a way forward.

All other actions have been completed.

4. CONSULTATIONS

Cllr Struan Mackie noted that he had a declaration of interest for the Thurso parking proposal.

Caithness Bus Network Survey

Cllr Struan Mackie noted that public bus services are reliant on the Highland Council and NRS Dounreay, and there is an issue with how resilient the public services are when these contracts are in place. The survey is important for us to contribute to,

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and he is happy to circulate it to the wider membership. He suggested that the DSG provide feedback on the element around Dounreay and its contracts.

Roger Saxon noted that the bus survey is a survey, while the other is a definite proposal for parking, and he has already submitted comments on parking. He was unsure if the survey was for the DSG or the Transport Forum.

Cllr Struan Mackie noted that he believed the survey is a potential precursor to the in-house provision of bus services by the Highland Council. He gave a transparency statement, noting that many are in favour of the in-house provision, which has been successful in the Black Isle, surrounding areas, and Inverness, adding additional resilience to rural routes and being a commercial driver for the Highland Council. He emphasized the importance of completing the survey, as it highlights the fragility of public services due to the Highland Council, school provision, and Dounreay, and will frame future conversations.

Peter Faccenda noted that at the Focus North launch, transport was a concern, and they worked on what may come next should the NRS Dounreay need for buses significantly diminish. It is a complicated area to cover, as Dounreay has needs and there are public needs, and this survey aims to address rural transport covered by community groups. The wider public service would impact these community groups, and balancing this without diminishing the sparse provision in rural areas is challenging. He thought bringing the service in-house could provide some benefits but must be done carefully. Sutherland has approached it differently, with a sub-group of the Sutherland community committee attempting to set up an independent transport company. He noted that Focus North struggled to get key players in a room to agree on a way forward, as contracts run on different timescales.

Cllr Struan Mackie agreed, noting that one of the big structural issues is dealing with the Highland region. He acknowledged that they are fortunate to have public transport infrastructure, as other areas do not always have this service.

Cllr Struan Mackie asked for this to be issued to the DSG members, and the BM will write directly to the Public Transport Team at the Highland Council.

Roger Saxon noted that if this is a precursor, it is not explicit in the email and suggested providing background information. He mentioned that there is no incentive to complete the survey if you are not a bus user. He also noted that several routes in Inverness are operated by Green Transport, which is not mentioned, and thought the Highland Council might be moving in this direction, but there is no indication of this. Peter Faccenda noted that in their surveying, they understood the journeys people were making, as the transport system should cover these journeys, not just those people already using existing bus services. This is a challenge, as the number of people moving in rural areas is small.

Action: DSG/BM(2024)M016/A01: Dawn Clasper to issue Caithness Bus Network Survey and the Thurso Parking Proposal Consultation to the DSG members.

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Action: DSG/BM(2024)M016/A02: DSG BM to write to the Highland Council Public Transport Team expressing their concerns.

Thurso Parking Proposal

Cllr Struan Mackie handed the chair of the meeting to David Alexander.

Gillian Coghill noted that the proposal has not considered the churches in the area, and parking for services and funerals is now limited.

Peter Faccenda asked what the driver for these changes was, as the rationale is not explained.

David Alexander noted that this proposal is from the Highland Council, and as Roger Saxon mentioned, there is a strong feeling on social media. He noted that the back streets are full of cars during the day, and residents are unable to park, hence the proposal for resident parking. He asked if the parking in the Co-op car park and the 2-hour maximum stay had been implemented. Cllr Struan Mackie responded that it has been implemented but was not being enforced. David Alexander noted that there should be more explanation, and while people will provide comments, there needs to be a rationale behind each case.

Roger Saxon noted that there should be a rationale for each change. He also noted that there is no mention of disabled parking or current restrictions in place, which also need to be explained and included.

There being no further comments, David Alexander handed the chair back to Cllr Struan Mackie.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following was raised:

- Dawn Clasper noted that she has updated the DSG forward diary for meetings and noted the October meeting falls in the school holidays. Agreed to move this to 8 October. Cllr Struan Mackie asked if the December public meeting would be made on MS Teams only. This was agreed by business meeting members. The forward diary will be approved at the public meeting in March.
- Cllr Struan Mackie noted attendance at the December virtual public meeting was very good. The discussion around the spaceport was important and the press coverage is part of crucial community engagement on the issue which is appreciated.
- Cllr Struan Mackie would like an in person meeting in January and March and to discuss membership. We need to continue the recruitment drive and have had 2 good new members join but still need more. At the top table we haven't had a change for a number of years and we need to look at succession planning.

6. CLOSE

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There being no further business, Cllr Struan Mackie thanked everyone for their input and formally closed the meeting.

Cllr Struan Mackie
DSG Chair
18 December 2024

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

DSG/BM(2024)M016/A01: Dawn Clasper to issue Caithness Bus Network Survey and the Thurso Parking Proposal Consultation to the DSG members.

DSG/BM(2024)M016/A02: DSG BM to write to the Highland Council Public Transport Team expressing their concerns.