



Minutes of Meeting

**Sutherland Spaceport Community Liaison Group (CLG) Meeting
Annual Public Meeting**

01 October 2024

19.00

Kyle Centre, Tongue

ATTENDEES			
Present		Online	
Frances Gunn	UpNorth Development Trust (Interim Chair)	Maggie Bochal	Aurora Planning
Lesley Still	Orbex	Steve Johnstone	Dynamic Concepts
Kirsteen Mackay	Orbex (Secretary)	Fraser Brown	Dynamic concepts
Martin Reid	Tongue Community Council	Eann Sinclair	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Mark Findlay	MCE Estate	Bea Ayling	RSPB
Derek Madden	Tongue Grazings	Amanda Mosely	Education
Peter Faccenda	HIE	Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
		Peter Guthrie	Highlands & Islands Enterprise

No	Description	Action	Due date
1.	Welcome and opening remarks from the Interim Chair		
	Frances welcomed everyone. Introductions were made from those present and those online.		
2.	Apologies		
	Apologies were received from:		



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tim Curtis, Caleb Montgomery, Allan Mackay and Barry Allsop 		
3.	Conflict of Interest		
	There were no conflicts of interest raised.		
4.	Items Arising from Previous Minutes/Notes		
	Minutes of last meeting were approved		
5.	Planning Update/Status		
5.1	<p>This agenda item was brought forward to allow Maggie to attend the first half of the meeting.</p> <p>Spaceport planning application update given by Maggie Bochal from Aurora Planning.</p>		
5.2	<p>Planning permission for the Spaceport was granted in August 2020 and that consent is currently being implemented. However, since starting work on the site a number of changes to the scheme have been required to satisfy operational requirements and in response to ground conditions, in order to further minimise the environmental impact of the Spaceport.</p> <p>The changes comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reduction in the footprint and height of the Launch Service Integration Facility and the associated area yard, as well as a reduction in the number of parking places; Relocation of the Antenna Park from the main Spaceport site to an adjacent site next to the existing telecommunications mast on the summit of Ben Tongue (including the creation of a small section of new access track); A reduction in the overall scale of the Launch Pad complex and changes to the layout, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving it about 20m further to the East to avoid areas of deeper peat Reducing the amount of hard-standing Making the lightning tower and lighting columns fully retractable in their non-launch state; Rationalisation of the access road and rail track between the LSIF and the Launch Pad into a single access road; Re-alignment of the access road between the A838 and the LSIF, again to avoid deeper peat; Changes to the design of the watercourse crossings, (which are now bridge crossings, rather than culverts, as have already been approved by Highland Council in discharging condition 25 of the original consent) and those increase the mammal migration paths beneath them and to fit with the realignment of the access road. 		



	<p>All of the proposed changes have been discussed and agreed in principle with The Council, SEAP and Nature Scot</p> <p>Whilst each of the changes on its own is relatively minor in nature, it was agreed with Highland Council that they should be considered collectively through the submission of a new planning application for the revised scheme as a whole.</p> <p>We carried out public consultation on that at the end of last year and the beginning of this year.</p> <p>The new planning application has now been submitted, with the final revised plans and supporting documentation, to the Highland Council at the end of August 2024. It is anticipated that the application will be determined by Highland Council's North Planning Applications Committee at its meeting at the end of October.</p> <p>Meanwhile, we continue to monitor progress with the implementation of the existing consent on a monthly basis.</p>		
6.	Matters Arising		
6.1	<p>Appointment of new chair for the group</p> <p>The group was asked to get in touch with the current Chair or the Secretary with nominations as to whom the group would like to take the Chair. Frances is at the moment Interim Chair.</p>	KM/FG - Email to be sent out to the group members, for the election of a new Chair.	01/02/2025
6.2	<p>Rotation of group members</p> <p>In line with the terms of reference for this group, members sit on the group for three years. If the body that they represent has the availability to send a different person to the meetings, then that is encouraged. It is also noted in the Terms of Reference that volunteer numbers are small in this rural area, therefore if a group does not have another member that can replace the person that has been on the CLG, that person has the ability to remain on the group.</p>	Email to be sent out to the group reminding them to have the discussion with their respective groups about different representation where someone has been on the CLG for more than three years.	01/02/2025
6.3	<p>Group Terms of Reference (ToR) update and sign off</p> <p>No changes to the terms of reference were requested by the group during the review period. The review of the ToR is therefore complete and will be reviewed again July 2025.</p>	Review Terms of Reference	01/06/2025
7.	Orbex Updates		
7.1	<p>Construction</p> <p>Update given by Fraser Brown and Steve Johnstone from Dynamic Concepts.</p> <p>DC is very happy with the progress on the project, completion of the road to the Launch Pad is on track to be finished by the end of December (weather permitting). The road will not all be floating, there will be about 50 metres that will not be required as it is on hard ground. This is the area leading up to the Launch Pad.</p>		



	<p>Bea (RSPB) asked about the alignment of the road and why it has move slightly. Fraser explained that the road alignment has moved slightly, but is still within the redline planning boundary, moving the alignment has resulted in less peat disturbance.</p> <p>Peter (HIE) asked if once the building of the Launch Pad starts will the traffic volumes/movements change at all?</p> <p>Once the stone works have been done, which is the traffic we see just now, it will be mostly be concrete wagons, so there will be a change in the vehicle type. Once the work on the Launch Pad starts there will be less traffic and smaller vehicles.</p>		
7.2	<p>Spaceport Open Days</p> <p>Lesley discussed the team effort that went in to making the Open Days a success. Feedback from the event has been extremely positive. With an appetite for more Open Days. She asked for feedback from the group and for suggestions as to how it could be improved.</p> <p>Peter Guthrie mentioned the short video which was created of the Open Days and how well it shows the progress of the project. This video can be viewed at http://orbex.space/news/sutherland-spaceport-open-days.</p> <p>Comment was made that visitors to the Open Days particularly appreciated the information given from the Environmental Clerk of Works. Information on the ongoing surveys (flora, fauna and bird) and how the environment is being protected.</p>		
7.3	<p>Environmental Update</p> <p>The environmental update from the ECoW is summarised here. If the group have any comments, please share with the Secretary for circulated to the ECoW and the group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The breeding bird surveys are being done throughout the construction phase of the project and will continue into the operational phase, occurring yearly and around Launch events. • Water sampling which is being carried out now downstream from the site has consistently produced results indicating there is no chemical pollution occurring. • Water sampling downstream of the site will continue into the operational state and will happen before and after each launch. • The first area of peat to be restored is looking good after the summer, many of the plants have started to revegetate and the water table in this area is expected to rise over winter which will help encourage the vegetation to regenerate further. • During both the construction and the operational phase regular monitoring and reporting done by the environmental clerk of works will continue. 		



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring the water levels and the vegetation in areas that have been restored will allow the progress of the restoration to be tracked. Other types of monitoring being carried out are water vole and otter surveys around the water crossings. The ambient meteorological parameters will also be tracked to monitor the climate around the site. <p>Currently the Environmental Clerk of Works visit the site twice weekly.</p>		
7.4	<p>Scottish Geological Survey</p> <p>Sensing the Aurora in Sutherland using a Quantum Magnetometer.</p> <p>Cieran Beggan from the British Geological survey in Edinburgh has been in touch with Melness Crofters' Estate (MCE) and Sutherland Spaceport with a proposal to position a magnetometer on the Mhoine. Discussions have been had with MCE as to where this can be sited.</p> <p>At present in the UK there is a network of six existing magnetic sensors. The BGS wish to extend this to include a further five new quantum magnetometers positioned throughout the UK allowing scientists to better measure local variations in the field.</p> <p>When there are widespread displays of the Aurora, problems with technology can occur affecting power grid operations and making GPS navigation very inaccurate, causing satellite orbits to change significantly. All data collected will be sent to the internet and will be freely available on the BGS website https://goemag.bgs.ac.uk/research/SAGE/variometer_data.html</p> <p>Peter Guthrie mentioned the 1850 Carrington event (the most intense geomagnetic solar storm recorded) well worth looking up if this interests you.</p>		
7.5	<p>Northumbria University Study</p> <p>SSL have been contacted by Peter Howson from Northumbria University. He is an Assistant Professor in International Development with the department of Geography and Environmental Sciences and part of the North East Space and Technology Centre.</p> <p>The North East Space and Technology Centre are involved in a project called Negotiating NewSpace. A collaboration between, Spaceport operators and researchers in both the UK and in the US. The project aims to ensure private sector NewSpace initiatives are driven by sound environmental management and result in equitable development outcomes. They have so far been exploring sites in New Mexico, Texas, California, West Papua and North Uist. Their specific interest is in how different groups are steering and negotiating these developments.</p> <p>They are interested in speaking to local groups.</p> <p>Peter Faccenda felt it would be good to hear how other groups around the world are influencing what is happening in their communities.</p>		



7.6	Jobs		
7.6.1	<p>The Chair requested that the discussion on local benefits/jobs/ and opportunities be a standing agenda item for the group, to keep the community up-to-date as to what is happening or not happening.</p> <p>The interest in job creation and the need for an open and realistic overview of the potential jobs at the Spaceport is something the community is asking for and would welcome. Employment in this area for those of working age is fairly high, new jobs may encourage new population growth, but we need to be prepared or opportunities will be lost.</p>	Local benefits/jobs and opportunities to be added as a standing agenda item	
7.6.2	<p>Lesley talked of the potential job opportunities once the Spaceport is running operationally and the initial test phase has passed. Launch cadence needs to be at a certain level before full time jobs will be available.</p> <p>Slides were shared at the meeting outlining potential job opportunities at the Spaceport itself, over a timeline of 1-5 years, 5-10 years and 10-15 years. These slides were drafted as part of Focus North Group looking at employment opportunities in the Caithness and Sutherland area and future skills requirement. They do not include potential business development that may arise from the Spaceport being in the area or supply chain Jobs.</p> <p>Lesley described the various potential jobs on the slides, how these would develop and the timeline to be expected, numbers rising years 1-5/5-10/10-15.</p> <p>It was also discussed the the Spaceport could not rely on SFRS (Scottish Fire and Rescue) for example, and if there was an appliance in the village, it would be remiss to site that at the Spaceport during launch due to the impact on response times for the local area. Initially it is intended that the Spaceport will engage with commercial fire cover operators, although the plan is to develop a local fire team when the launch cadence becomes regular. Our hope is that no only would a Fire team serve the Spaceport, but it could potentially fill the current gap for the community too. Likewise the team is looking at drone provision for aerial surveillance and the aspiration is to recruit locally once cadence was established.</p> <p>Lesley reiterated that Orbex have a strong preference for a home-grown work force as not only the right thing for the community, but that it made good business sense too for continuity.</p>		
7.6.3	<p>The group were advised that any tangible job opportunities would be potentially after the second test launch, the recent events in Shetland/Saxaford reminding us all that there are no guarantees of success, and the group were also reminded that we have a planned gap of a number of months between the first and second launches.</p>		
7.6.4	<p>Orbex are engaging with University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) regarding course requirements for future Skills needed.</p>		



	<p>Peter (HIE) mentioned Business Building - where once there is steady flow of activity around the facility, opportunities will present themselves and this will more than likely follow with the Spaceport.</p> <p>Graduate opportunities are mostly in Forres at the moment, it being the main point for all the companies research and development. There were 750 applications for the intern positions this year. The group were advised that if they know of any local graduate who is applying to Forres, to let Lesley and Kirsteen know and they will flag to the Talent Acquisition team.</p> <p>There is potential to join with education establishments and be involved in PhD projects involving the Spaceport. This is currently being discussed with DYWF and UHI to understand opportunity and how we progress this.</p>		
7.6.5	<p>Trudy (Chamber), commented on the availability of the Caithness Business Fund, which stretches as far as Tongue and Melness, and that it supports apprentices in these areas. They also have their talent attraction program, which has a focus on the North, to help people to see potential and relocate to these north areas.</p>		
7.6.6	<p>The chair reiterated the need to know of potential job numbers in the area and timelines from a community planning perspective. Housing being a very real issue in the remote and rural parts of Sutherland. The aim is to be able to future proof and have an evidence base to create an infrastructure that will make the best of the opportunities the spaceport may bring with growth and repopulation, with particular focus on housing. This is something very much supported by the rest of the CLG and wider community.</p> <p>Lesley commented, it is Orbex's intent that information on timeline and any job opportunities as they present will be shared with the CLG and Community as they appear.</p>		
7.6.7	<p>The Community Council recently requested that we consider creating a small bursary that would help support and encourage a student from the local schools heading off to study STEM subjects at higher education level, Lesley reported that we have broached the subject with DYWF as to how we can achieve this.</p>		
7.6.8	<p>Amanda Mosely (Education) - expressed the wish to see more outreach to the schools, particularly in coming to speak to the younger children on the potential for job opportunities within the space industry. The schools work closely with DYW which is something we can tap into. Lesley confirmed that we can investigate that.</p>	<p>Request of Increase in schools outreach.</p> <p>LS/KM - Enquire about sourcing this.</p>	
7.7	<p>Visitor Management Plan (VMP)</p> <p>There was a presentation to the CLG members and other stakeholders on the proposals for the Visitor Management Plan (VMP) for launch days, this was held on the 30th of September at the North coast connections in Tongue. All CLG members</p>		



	<p>were invited to attend. Comments from that meeting were positive, an overview of that meeting will be shared with this group before the end of this week.</p> <p>There were no further comments on the VMP at this meeting.</p>		
8.	Questions /Comments Raised		
	<p>Tongue Grazings (Derek) asked if the lease agreement with Tongue Estate and Orbex with regard to Ben Tongue had been finalised.</p> <p>Kirsteen reported that this is not a subject that Orbex can comment on. The Chair and the Melness Grazings representative both agreed that normally this is a conversation that will happen between Tongue Estates and the Tongue Grazings when there is progress to report. Tongue Estate being the Crofters landlord.</p>		
9.	Date of Next meeting		
9.1	<p>The next scheduled meeting for the CLG is on 18 March 2025. This will be the Annual Public Meeting.</p> <p>Members are reminded to please tell their respective groups and community members about this meeting when the time comes, and that they can call a meeting of the CLG group at anytime if they feel there are issues that the group needs to discuss.</p>	KM - Schedule next meeting.	
9.2	<p>Invites/agenda and previous minutes to be emailed two weeks before the date of the next meeting.</p>	KM to distribute invites, agenda and previous minutes	01/02/2025