

Agenda Item	7
Report No	RACC 2/12

Summary

Proposal to carry out two community dialogue projects looking at climate change and its effect on local landscape and ecosystem services provided by the area. These projects would be pilot projects using the ‘Talking about our place’ community dialogue toolkit that Scottish Natural Heritage is producing with input from other agencies including The Highland Council.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Over the past two years, research into the effects of climate change on Scotland’s landscapes has been undertaken by Land Use Consultants (LUC) for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). In 2010 a community dialogue approach was developed for SNH and Sciencewise ERC, by LUC and Small Town and Rural Initiative (STAR), to explore people’s attitudes to the impact of climate change on their local landscape and the ecosystem services it provides.

This approach was developed in two communities, one in Dumfries and Galloway and the other in the Nairnshire area. The work established that the local landscape made a good platform for identifying and understanding the benefits that a community derive from their environment (ecosystem services), and the effect of landscape change (in this case due to climate change) on those benefits. It also explored the policy drivers that this work could feed in to at local and national scales. In both projects it was found that talking about the local landscape and its identifying features meant that the communities were more confident discussing the services provided and articulate the value which the area held for them. Whilst the SNH project explored landscape issues around climate change, it is considered that its usefulness could be expanded to explore other pressures on a landscape and use this discussion to link with economic and demographic issues in the area.

‘Talking About Our Place’ is building on this earlier work, developing a structured approach to “talking about” landscape with the aim of enabling communities to independently consider their place and surroundings, and input into decisions around landscape change in their area. The work is focussed on developing an accessible and practical ‘online toolkit’ (i.e. a collection of resources) enabling communities to carry out this dialogue and use it to feed into other decision making processes. It is designed to be predominately run within the community with support from external agencies such as the local authorities or SNH, but not managed by those agencies. This is the interesting part of the project and should mean that it can be rolled out across a wider range of communities at a much lower resource cost and with outputs geared towards the communities’ requirements.

This approach is timely and in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Landscape Convention, which call for stakeholder involvement in planning future landscapes, as well as linking with the move to greater community involvement in planning. The outputs of the community dialogue will be compatible for use by local authorities and other agencies in considering landscape in land use and planning decisions and its success will rely on a good working relationship between

communities and decision making bodies. The pilot projects would be an excellent test of the success of the toolkit as well as providing examples of how it can be used in reality. This work will assist THC and SNH in meeting National Outcomes 11, 12 and 14 and Local Outcomes 11 C (Communities take a greater role in shaping their futures), 12E (our natural heritage is protected and enhanced enabling it to deliver economic, health and learning benefits) and 14F (carbon emissions are reduced and communities are protected from the consequences of changing weather patterns) of the Single Outcome Agreement both are committed to.

2 PROCESS AND TIMESCALE

2.1 The pilots that we propose to run in partnership between The Highland Council and SNH would be using this toolkit as a guide for communities exploring the effects climate change will have on their place. The toolkit is designed for use in rural areas and small settlements, it considers change and impacts on ecosystem services at a landscape scale (defined in part by the community) which are harder to establish in urban settings. Most rural communities within the Highland Council Area would be suitable for this pilot work, excepting those where work is being or has been already carried out. Outcomes from Highland Council projects in Gairloch and Loch Ewe and Nairnshire have been input into the toolkit and there now exists an ideal opportunity to build on this further with partnership working between SNH and THC helping to guide the pilot communities through the use of the toolkit and tailor the methodology to the Highlands. The **proposed timescale** would be to run these pilots between **April and July 2012**, allow maximum engagement around school holidays, the weather and the commitments of the tourist season with this being reported back on with the outcomes and recommended next steps in the Autumn.

3 DESIRED OUTCOMES

- 3.1 In general terms, the key aim of the project is to enable and assist communities to:
- Consider their place and surroundings and identify the benefits they derive from their local environment (specifically ecosystem services).
 - Understand the effect of landscape change, in this case caused by climate change, on ecosystem services.
 - Input into decisions around landscape change, particularly in dialogue with local authorities and other organisations.
 - Organise their priorities in enhancing the place they live in, including advice on accessing support for future actions.

The outcome will be a climate change action plan produced by the community through the dialogue process with clear vision as to how they wish to progress this in the future. In carrying out these pilots the longer term objective is to produce case studies which can be used to show how the toolkit is used in a Highland context to inspire other communities to initiate it. There will also be promotion to broadcast this to a wider audience.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial costs would be supporting the community through providing venue costs, or part of them; travel for the Highland Council Sustainability officer (this would be shared with SNH where practical); possibly printing costs for resources although the community will be encouraged to think of alternative ways of providing these. This is designed to be considerably cheaper than many dialogue processes by reducing the need for external facilitation. Other resources would include time from the Council Officers involved in the pilot. Currently the Sustainable Development Officer and Ward

Managers would be key contacts. SNH would be able to provide staff time and expertise and will be involved in promoting the toolkit on a wider basis as well as in the Highland area.

5 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

5.1 This project will especially assist THC in meeting the second two aims of the Scotland's climate change declaration

- taking steps to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of a changing climate
- working in partnership with their communities to respond to climate change

It also helps both SNH and THC in working towards meeting the aims of the Highland Climate Change Declaration

- Share information and work with partners in Highland to promote good practice on climate change;
- Encourage and work with others in business and communities to take action to adapt to the impact of climate change to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions and to make the public committed to action.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The pilot project would assist SNH and THC to meet the public bodies' climate change duties by working with the wider community to encourage action on climate change.

7 EQUALITIES IMPACTS

7.1 An equality impact assessment will be carried out in partnership with the community as this is to be part of the process the toolkit will guide them through.

8 RISKS

8.1 As long as the process is transparent and equality and risk assessments are carried out there should be no foreseeable risk to the Highland Council

RECOMMENDATION

The Rural Affairs and Climate Change Strategy Group is asked to approve the proposal to carry out two pilot projects in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage and to assist in choosing two suitable communities.

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Designation: Local landscapes Officer, Scottish Natural Heritage

Date: 24/01/2012