

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CAITHNESS AREA COMMITTEE – 26th February, 2007

Agenda Item	12
Report No	CC/49/07

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT REGENERATION FUND (Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme)

Joint Report by Director of Planning & Development and Caithness Area Manager

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the Historic Scotland grant award for the Wick Pulteneytown Conservation Area and seeks Members agreement to related financial, contractual and management issues to enable the contract with Historic Scotland to be signed and the grant scheme initiated.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 29 May, 2006 the Caithness Area Committee considered a report by the Director of Planning and Development which advised that Historic Scotland through its Historic Environment Regeneration Fund (Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme - CARS) had awarded Wick Pulteneytown £1.5m over a 5-year period, including 2006/07. It was agreed that once the contract was received from Historic Scotland a future more detailed report would be presented to the Area Committee.
- 1.2 While Historic Scotland had initially hoped to get a contract almost immediately to the Council, considerable delay was incurred as Historic Scotland needed to prepare a new form of contract. While a contract has now been received and is of considerable length and potentially onerous on individual applicants/recipients for grant, it is felt that further to representations from the Council and other local authorities, that sufficient flexibility now exists to enable the Council to shape contracts to individual circumstances. This matter will, however, need to be kept under review.

2 SCHEME DETAILS

- 2.1 To progress matters there is a need to agree:-
- to the conditions of Historic Scotland grant, and
 - the types of buildings which will benefit from the CARS grant scheme, and
 - the management process to be adopted, and
 - confirm funding from other sources.
- 2.2 **Conditions of Grant**
Six conditions of grant have been specified:
Critical
1. Article 4 Directions reviewed and refreshed as necessary in consultation with Scottish Ministers through Historic Scotland.
 2. Preparation of a Conservation Area Management Plan for the burgh to sustain improvements, create a vision and resist unauthorised alterations through strong

- planning controls.
3. Partnership funding to be confirmed.

Desirable

4. Establish building preservation trust involvement to take specific projects forward where necessary.
5. Develop working relationship with Scottish Lime Centre and other training providers so as to establish a skills base in NE Highlands
6. Archaeological assessments to be provided where appropriate for all schemes undergoing development under this initiative.

In response to these conditions it is proposed that:

1. The Article 4 Direction is reviewed and refreshed following the preparation of the Conservation Area Management Plan and the establishment of the grant scheme for a number of years.
2. A Conservation Area Appraisal is undertaken and Management Plan prepared. When progressing this appraisal and management plan, the objective will be to fully engage the local community in preserving and enhancing their own historic built environment. To this end, with the professional support of the Council, it is proposed that the Royal Burgh of Wick Community Council in conjunction with the Wick Project be invited to establish a focus group to produce a Conservation Area Review and Appraisal and be responsible for wider local consultation. These two documents would then inform the Conservation Management Plan which would then be considered and adopted by The Highland Council.

Such an approach would:

- Deliver full and effective community participation
 - Promote involvement in local action
 - Raise awareness of local issues
 - Strengthen local ownership of the decision-making and management processes
 - Establish a new high standard of community involvement
 - Demonstrate that Highland Council is meeting the needs of its communities
 - Enhance pride of place locally
 - Ensure better-understood and well-managed conservation areas
 - Set best practice for conservation professionals in local government
3. Partnership funding will be confirmed on a project by project basis.
 4. Building Preservation Trust involvement will take place with specific projects where and when appropriate.
 5. A good relationship with the Scottish Lime Centre has been established and will be built upon for future training events.
 6. Archaeological assessments will be undertaken as requested albeit it is considered that the requirement for such assessments will be addressed through the development control process.

2.3 Types of Buildings

As reported to the Area Committee in June 2006, Historic Scotland requires resources from the Historic Environment Regeneration Fund to be directed to where conservation of the historic environment also delivers benefits to disadvantaged communities. In other words where conservation-led physical regeneration assists other regeneration activity - in this case, the Wick Pulteneytown Community Regeneration Fund actions. Hence Historic Scotland grant is largely directed to properties within Lower Pulteneytown, where the

majority of “at risk”, that is vacant or semi vacant buildings, or buildings in a serious state of disrepair, are located. However, as part of the Council’s application, properties elsewhere in the Conservation Area will also receive grant to restore traditional details and structures and in that way enhance the character and integrity of the conservation area. Bringing vacant buildings back into use for both residential and commercial purposes will assist with the overall economic regeneration of the area and the town.

2.4 **Management**

The current Wick Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Management Group is chaired by a local Councillor and comprises one community representative and a senior staff member from each of HIE-Caithness and Sutherland, Communities Scotland and the Highland Council. This Group, as per condition of the Heritage Lottery Fund grant award, is charged with carrying out the approved purposes as set out in the application as varied or supplemented by the Trustees of the National Heritage Fund in accordance with the contract, the action plan and the requirements of the monitoring documents until 31 December 2008. There are benefits in tasking this Management Group with the additional remit to carry out the terms of the new Historic Scotland contract for the administration of the CARS to give continuity between the THI and CARS and ensure that the community and the funding partners remain active in the regeneration of Wick Pulteneytown. This would mean extending the role of this Group from December 2008 until March 2012.

FUNDING

- 3.1 As previously reported Historic Scotland has awarded up to £1.5m over a 5 year period including 2006/07 to fund conservation works within Pulteneytown. Funding will be released on the basis that contributions are secured from a range of other sources that may include The Highland Council, HIE-Caithness and Sutherland, Communities Scotland and private finance.
 - 3.1.1 **The Highland Council, Planning and Development Services.** Planning, Development, Europe and Tourism Committee agreed on 31 May 2006 to forward commit £30k approx. in each of the financial years 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 as the Council’s contribution to the Project Manager post and overhead costs.
 - 3.1.2 **The Highland Council, Housing Services.** The Council has the ability to invest in improvement and repairs within the private sector through provision of grant or loan. Over the past 3 years the Council has awarded grant of £120,000 and loans totalling £370,000 to projects within the Lower Pulteneytown THI. This investment has been made available from the Non HRA Capital programme, funded from Private Sector Housing Grant (PSHG). It is intended that the Area Committee make a bid to Housing and Social Work Committee for an additional £300,000 of funding over the 5 year period of the CARS project, and that up to a further £100,000 of Area allocation be earmarked for projects in the area.
 - 3.1.3 **HIE-Caithness and Sutherland.** The local enterprise company will continue to support the regeneration of Pulteneytown on a project by project basis where suitable projects are brought forward from the area as they have done within the THI area.
 - 3.1.4 **Communities Scotland.** Housing Association Grant (HAG) funding, made available through Communities Scotland, is directed in accordance with the Highland Housing Strategy. HAG funding has previously enabled redevelopment of the former NOSWA

depot fronting on to Telford Street, which provides 16 affordable houses. Additional funding has been secured allowing the adjoining former NOSWA office and derelict house to be redeveloped by Pentland Housing Association. A further £726,000 has in principle been agreed which will assist to fund a project within the 5-year life of the CARS project.

- 3.1.5 **Private Finance.** Private finance will be contributed by individual owners and developers of the projects assisted through the CARS scheme.
- 3.1.6 **Other Potential Sources.** The Project Manager will continue to develop the Project in ways that will maximise investment and regeneration opportunities. This will include continuing to seek opportunities to promote the traditional building skills training projects throughout the period seeking potential sources of funding which may include European, Lottery or other Trusts' funds.

4 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Project has the ability to attract a total investment of £4.9M with joint agency funding of up to £2.4M with contributions of £400,000 from PSHG and £90,000 from Planning and Development Services.

5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Members are asked to:-

- a) consider the report and agree to the conditions of grant, types of buildings to be targeted and management process proposed, and
- b) agree that a bid be made to Housing and Social Work Committee for an additional £300,000 of PSHG funding over the 5 year period of the CARS project, and that up to a further £100,000 of Area allocation be earmarked for projects in the area.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning & Development Service

Signature:

Designation Caithness Area Manager

Date: 14 February, 2007

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