



The Peatlands Partnership

Flows project will help drive north economy – Experts agree

An ambitious project to deliver a world-class visitor facility in an internationally important area of peatlands has received significant backing from some of the region's most influential economic and tourism figures.

Their comments come as plans for the Peatlands Partnership's £9.6 million Flow to the Future project gather pace.

It is set to generate significant economic impacts in Sutherland, Caithness and the Highlands, and will restore seven square miles of damaged peatland and deliver visitor, volunteer and research facilities.

Peatlands are vital to our continued capture of carbon, and the scheme will promote the Flow Country's role in combating the worse effects of climate change.

And with nature-based tourism contributing £1.4 billion a year to the Scottish economy, our natural assets can help generate economic benefits for rural areas.

Eann Sinclair, programme manager for the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership (CNSRP), the body established to address the socio-economic effects of decommissioning at the Dounreay nuclear energy site, said: "The Flow to the Future project is clearly going to be a very significant project and the £9.6million investment that the Peatlands Partnership will be making in The Flow Country will undoubtedly have many beneficial social, environmental and economic impacts across our area.

"I very much welcome this project which will help further diversify the area's economy away from its current dependence on Dounreay decommissioning. CNSRP partners will continue to look at ways of supporting elements of the project through the CNSRP Delivery Plan 2014-17, and we look forward to seeing benefits from its delivery over the coming years."

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) commissioned consultants EKOS with the Tourism Resources Company (TRC) to prepare an Economic Impact Assessment.

Economists use a measurement called Gross Value Added (GVA) which estimates the additional money, over and above the actual project expenditure, that a project can generate in an area. During the Flow to the Future project it is predicted that GVA will be £740,000 in year two, stabilising to £190,000 in year six and onwards.

And over 30 years the GVA is estimated to be £6.3 million for Sutherland and Caithness – £10.2 million for the Highlands as a whole – helping to sustain local jobs and support fragile communities.

It is expected visitors to the RSPB's Forsinard Flows reserve will double after five years to more than 9000 a year. It will also create more jobs for the local area from the current 12 to an additional 26 FTE posts during the project and around 11 FTEs in future years. This includes contractors and others.

Joan Campbell MBE also welcomed the tourism potential of the Flow to the Future project.

The Melvich-based tourism expert and author stressed: "I am well aware of the need to further develop this area to encourage more sustainable growth both economically and socially. I cannot think of a more worthy project. To make the required impact, the development has to be big. This is, but will be developed sensitively across the Flow Country. This kind of project is badly needed, and I commend the Peatland Partnership for their entrepreneurial spirit and foresight. I wish them every success.

"This project will surely mean that Caithness and Sutherland has a future in tourism and will ensure its place on the worldwide map when people make their holiday plans seeking destinations that meet the needs of today's discerning visitor."

Joan also revealed she had read 'with considerable excitement' the Peatlands Partnership's plans to develop the Flow Country of Caithness & Sutherland and added: "I have worked for 50 years in tourism, both developing my own business before retirement and in mentoring many others across Scotland."

"Tourism is also at the heart of most of my voluntary work with boards and committees including being a member of the Highlands & Islands Tourism Awards board."

Across Scotland, 11% of total economic output is dependent on the natural environment and helps support more than 242,000 jobs.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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Green Stimulus Package, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Highland Council, RSPB, Scotland Rural Development Programme, Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Tubney Trust.

The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife International and The Environmental Research Institute. It liaises with local community groups, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate and the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust. It is independently chaired by John Henderson of Scrabster Farm, Caithness.

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