

# Sutherland Partnership Board of Management

Minute of meeting held at 1400 on Monday 15 February 2010, in Lairg.

## 1. Meeting attendance / Introduction and Apologies.

### Directors.

Robbie Rowantree (HC Councillor)(Chair)  
Ann Keatinge (VGES)(Acting chair, meeting start)  
Linda Munro (HC Councillor)  
George Farlow (HC Councillor)  
Russell Rekhy (North Highland College/UHI)  
John McMorran (Scottish Crofting Foundation)

### Others present.

William Sutherland (SP Manager)(Secretary)  
Phil Tomalin (HC)  
Anne Sutherland (HIE)  
Lesley Cranna (SNH)  
Frances Gunn (CVS North)  
Ronnie Lansley (CVS North)  
Mary Macleod (NFS/WfF)  
Graham Jones (SP Treasurer)  
Iain Muir (Geopark Steering Group Chair)  
Becky Shaw (Rural Analysis Associates)  
Frank Gaskell (Rural Analysis Associates)

**1. Introduction and Apologies.** Sutherland Partnership Chairman Councillor Robbie Rowantree having been unavoidably delayed, Director Ann Keatinge opened the meeting and welcomed delegates, especially those attending their first meeting: Becky Shaw and Frank Gaskell (of our Sutherland Summit /Action and Development Plan consultants Rural Analysis Associates), Iain Muir (Geopark Steering Group chair) and Sgt Keith Robb (Northern Constabulary). Apologies received from: Ian Ross, Deirdre Mackay, Ian Hargrave, Ramsay Aitken, Andy Mackay, Tim Cockerill, Georgia Haire, Fiona Mackenzie, and Malcolm McCall.

**2. a. Mr Alex Murray.** The Board noted with great sadness the death of its Vice-chairman Alex Murray, who had worked tirelessly on behalf of Sutherland Partnership, first representing CASE, then NFU Scotland.

**b. Mr Malcolm McCall.** Mr Malcolm McCall of Inverbrora Farm had kindly agreed to stand for SP Board membership, representing NFU Scotland in succession to Mr Alex Murray. Nominated by John McMorran, seconded by Linda Munro. Carried unanimously.

**8. Geopark Matters.** This item was moved up the agenda, as Geopark Vice-chairman George Farlow would have to leave the meeting at around 3 p.m.

**a. Geopark Officer's Report.** It was noted that Geopark Officer Fiona Mackenzie, unable to attend today owing to illness, had remained busy and proactive over this reporting period. The Geopark Officer's report was then taken as read in view of the urgency of Geopark funding issues.

**b. Geopark Funding – SRDP Delay and its Implications.** William Sutherland briefed on this item. Following failure of the Geopark to raise all the match funding for Geopark activity until March 2012, Sutherland Partnership had bid to the Scottish Government for an uplift in SRDP funding from 50% to 87%. That bid had been made as long ago as last July, but no reply had been received. Geopark core/project funding will now run out at the end of March, and would have done so already but for generous and rapid emergency support from SNH. William had drawn up plans for a revised Geopark budget at 50% SRDP intervention rate, using all match funding already received, expected or to be bid for: the result was a much reduced programme totalling

£143,000 (as opposed to the original package of £310,000.) Reaching this sum would require an infusion of £5,000 from Sutherland Partnership and another £5,000 from Highland Council's Ward 1 Discretionary Budget.

The following key points emerged in discussions.

- The lack of any SRDP response was very disappointing. The financial plight of both our Geopark and the Lochaber Geopark contrasted sharply with the stable long-term future of most foreign geoparks.
- We should now set early time scales for actions.
- We should work in concert with Scotland's other Geoparks as far as possible.
- We should now expose our difficulties to a wide range of possible supporters, including Government ministers Jim Mather and Roseanna Cunningham, MP John Thurso and all Highland MSPs.

The following actions were then agreed.

- Sutherland Partnership will contribute £5,000 to the Geopark programme 2009-12. This will come from SP Projects account - half from unattached funds accumulated from account interest, and half from money previously set aside as contingency funding for staff redundancy. Latter will be replenished over time.
- William Sutherland to draft another letter (our third) to Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead, for signature of SP Chairman Robbie Rowantree, as soon as possible. *[p.m.n. Letter dispatched 18 February, requesting an early and favourable decision on SRDP uplift.]*
- A wide range of copy addressees should be made aware of the Geopark's plight. *[p.m.n. a letter was sent out to these on 19 February, enclosing a copy of our letter to Richard Lochhead.]*
- William Sutherland and Fiona Mackenzie should continue to work up plans for a much-reduced Geopark programme 2009-12. *[p.m.n. this has been done, with the Geopark action grid attached to the original SRDP application having been modified and reduced to fit the reduced funds likely to be available.]*
- Regrettably, notice to be given to Geopark Officer Fiona Mackenzie, with effect from 31 March 2010. *[p.m.n. done 16 February.]*

**3/4. Minute of the Board Meeting of 9 November 2009.** Minutes were proposed by Lesley Cranna, seconded by Ann Keatinge, and accepted. There were no matters arising

**5. Action and Development Plan for Sutherland.** Ann Keatinge summarised progress on the Action and Development Plan (A&DP), mentioning the Sutherland Summit meeting last September, follow up workshops across Sutherland late in 2009, and submission of the current draft A&DP document to Board members very recently. Becky Smith of Rural Analysis Associates (RAA), supported by colleague Frank Gaskell, talked to their draft Plan. Key points.

- A&DP must reflect Board's wishes. A wider range of stakeholders would be given access to the document before publication, but the consultation phase was past.
- Whilst Board members had had limited time to read the Plan, there was praise for it, particularly in terms of its practicality and its potential to achieve "quick wins".
- SP Board needs to concentrate on those A&DP items which can be achieved as a partnership. A weakness of the previous SP strategy document 2005-9 was that it had tried to track too many issues being pursued by others. The "monitoring and evaluation" activity therefore needs to be focused and effective. There needs to be clarity on targets, and the catch-all "item ongoing" needs to be avoided.
- It was noted, with some regret, that Plan items were skewed towards public and agency funding rather than private enterprise. It was accepted, though, that Sutherland will inevitably draw heavily on public funding, given the challenges local businesses face.

Also, the various funding sources available now looked promising, with LEADER and SRDP funding, and windfarm funding streams, available to match fund HC Ward discretionary funding.

- Whilst there was still some way to go before the A&DP achieved “strategic fit” with HIE’s new aims and objectives, there had been progress towards this.
- The A&DP draft still had some way to go before being ready to promulgate to a wider audience. RAA would produce the completed draft by the end of this week (Friday 19 February) for Board member comments by Email in early course thereafter. Board members would be asked to give their positive assent to the Plan’s promulgation.
- Thereafter, RAA will have very little scope to take actions further, and action to progress Plan items will pass to SP members. There was optimism that the A&DP will be a useful vehicle for collating and progressing viable action items.

**6. Community Project Development Scheme for Sutherland.** Phil Tomalin spoke to this paper, written by him and Andy Mackay, which proposed that Sutherland Partnership should be the Sutherland agents for a recently-begun Highland-wide scheme to grant funds to community groups to pay for professional help in developing their community projects. This could be useful for supporting community groups to help deliver the Sutherland Action and Development Plan. The scheme was jointly funded by Highland Council and LEADER. Each Sutherland Ward would contribute £5,000, with LEADER contributing £9,000. Applicants would also be required to contribute 5%, and maximum funding per application would be £2000. The Board approved the proposal that SP staff administer this scheme in Sutherland, and William Sutherland will action. **Action: William Sutherland**

**7. New Futures Sutherland /Working for Families Report.** Mary Macleod talked to her report. A current lack of applicants means that New Futures Sutherland will struggle to meet its output targets. Board members suggested proactive public relations – perhaps a press release to Northern Times and/or Press & Journal. **Action: Mary Macleod**

Working for Families arrangements are changing, with Highland Council taking delivery “in house”. Current WfF project workers will cease to be SP employees, and will work for Highland Council. Employment transfer arrangements are in progress, with due regard to TUPE requirements. The potential client group for WfF’s successor organisation is expanding towards the client group for NFS, so there may be implications for NFS in the future also.

**9. HIE Community Account Management and Opportunities for Sutherland Partnership.** Anne Sutherland sought SP Board endorsement of HIE plans to concentrate its CAM efforts on Helmsdale (whose community agreed at a public meeting) Lochinver and Durness (to be confirmed following public meetings there.) The Board unanimously endorsed the HIE decision on communities to be targeted.

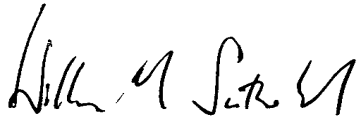
**10. Sutherland LEADER LAP Outputs Progress - Update.** Frances Gunn updated the Board on projects which had made successful application at the most recent LAP meeting and subsequently. These were: the Forest Education Initiative; CVS North “Youth Experience”; and North Highland Curling Club Environmental Assessment. Highland Birchwoods’ current application will be taken by Email. Frances commented on the difficulties caused by LEADER’s relatively low intervention rate ceiling, and consequent match funding difficulties.

**11. Financial Statements.** Treasurer Graham Jones briefed. With the exception of the Geopark Account (Agenda item 8 above) all SP accounts are operating within budget. The Community Transport Account has been reduced to zero following the donation to North West Community Transport Association and the SIP account now contains only a residual amount. It will be kept as a “reserve” account, in case an extra SP account is needed at any stage. William Sutherland reported that he and Graham had conducted their periodic review of possible high-

interest accounts, and had concluded that, given current very low interest rates and the administrative complication of opening new accounts, no action was required. Board agreed.

12. **AOCB.** None.

13. **Dates of 2010 Meetings.** Board meeting dates for 2010 were confirmed as Mondays 17 May (NOT the incorrect date on today's meeting's agenda) 23 August and 15 November.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W M Sutherland'.

W M SUTHERLAND

Sutherland Partnership Manager, Secretary, Sutherland Partnership Board