



SPACEPORT 1 PROJECT UPDATE

Report by Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide an update on progress in relation to the Spaceport 1 enabling infrastructure construction, overview the project priorities for the coming period, and to seek agreement as to the Comhairle's representation on the Scolpaig Farm Habitat and Amenity Management Plan Steering Group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Since September 2024, significant progress has been made in relation to enabling infrastructure phase of the Spaceport 1 project.
- 2.2 The planning permission granted in July 2023 is subject to ongoing compliance with thirty-five legally enforceable conditions. Condition twenty-three, which must be discharged prior to use of Spaceport 1, pertains to the development of a Habitat and Amenity Management Plan and the establishment of an associated Steering Group.
- 2.3 Scolpaig Farm represents a locally important resource for its ecological value, agricultural use, public access / recreation and cultural heritage and it is acknowledged that the Comhairle's ownership of the Farm presents an opportunity to develop a tangible community asset.
- 2.4 It is proposed to appoint two Comhairle Members to the Habitat and Amenity Management Plan Steering Group, and that these should be the elected representatives for North Uist. Nominations from key stakeholder organisations will also be sought and advisory support will be provided by Comhairle Officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle:**
 - (a) **note the update on the construction of the enabling infrastructure as outlined at paragraphs 6.1 – 6.5;**
 - (b) **note the priorities for the coming period as outlined at paragraphs 8.1 – 8.5; and**
 - (c) **agree that the elected Members for Uibhist a Tuath be the Comhairle representatives on the and Amenity Management Plan Steering Group.**

Contact Officer: Alison MacCorquodale, Project Manager - Space

Appendix: None

Background Papers: Spaceport 1 Update Report, September 2024 Series of Meetings

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The financial package to support the development of Spaceport 1 up to the point of appointment of a private sector operator was approved by the Comhairle in September 2024. Associated match funding was approved by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in October 2024.
Legal	Development of the Habitat and Amenity Management Plan (HAMP) and establishment of the associated Steering Group is a legally enforceable condition under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.
Staffing	The project continues to be delivered by the Project Manager – Spaceport, with support from members of the Spaceport 1 Project Board and Delivery Team as appropriate. This support will extend to the HAMP Steering Group.
Assets and Property	The Comhairle owns Scolpaig Farm and has committed to identifying ways in which the uses of and resources within Scolpaig Farm can be managed and improved, particularly for environmental gain and community benefit.
Strategic Implications	Delivery of the Spaceport 1 project and the ongoing management of Scolpaig Farm aligns with key local and national policies and strategies.
Risk	A failure to discharge any of the Planning Conditions (condition twenty-three being the main focus of this Report) would delay or prevent Spaceport 1 from becoming operational.
Equalities	Public access to Scolpaig Farm has been improved through the provision of a pedestrian gate and upgrading the track to the Farm complex. Further access improvements may be the focus of the HAMP Steering Group.
Corporate Strategy	Delivery of the Spaceport 1 project will contribute to the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy in that it will ' <i>strengthen the local economy</i> '.
Environmental Impact	<p>Environmental Impact was assessed during the Planning process and thirty-five conditions – largely related to the environment – are attached to the Planning consent. The Comhairle as 'developer' is responsible for discharging the conditions.</p> <p>The HAMP will set out ways to balance the various uses of and interests in Scolpaig Farm and set out ways to manage and maintain the site, particularly in terms of enhancing biodiversity.</p> <p>Ecological assessments (birds and bats) are ongoing at Scolpaig Farm and will inform the HAMP.</p>
Consultation	In the Environmental Impact Assessment for Spaceport 1, a commitment was made to develop a HAMP and establish an associated Steering Group, and this has been formalised by condition. Consultation with key stakeholders and the local community will be undertaken in Summer 2025 to inform the first iteration of the HAMP. Steering Group members will ensure that the views of the community are considered in the implementation of the HAMP. Prior to use of Spaceport 1, the first iteration of the HAMP will be submitted to the Planning Authority for approval.

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Comhairle has led the development of the Spaceport 1 project since its inception, bringing in expertise from the private sector where necessary to further elements of the project. Through the provision of modest, generic infrastructure, Spaceport 1 will meet the requirements of a range of commercial operators of suborbital launch vehicles
- 5.2 Planning permission for the Spaceport 1 development was granted on 26 July 2023, subject to the development being undertaken in accordance with thirty-five conditions. From a risk and project management perspective, ensuring ongoing compliance with the Planning conditions is critical. A failure by the Comhairle to discharge any of its obligations could delay or prevent Spaceport 1 from becoming operational. It is vital therefore that the Habitat and Amenity Management workstream is kicked off in June 2025.
- 5.3 At the February 2024 Committee series, it was agreed that the Comhairle would deliver the 'enabling' infrastructure at Scolpaig Farm, and that a private sector organisation – responsible for delivering the more technical, 'spaceport' infrastructure and operating the facility - would be appointed via a procurement process.
- 5.4 In September 2024, the Comhairle considered the work and associated expenditure required to deliver the Spaceport 1 project to the point of appointing an operator. It was agreed to award the contract for construction of the enabling infrastructure, subject to the outcome of discussions with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) regarding match-funding.
- 5.5 This Report provides an update on project progress since the September 2024 committee series and details the priorities for the coming period.

ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT- PROGRESS

- 6.1 In October 2024, HIE approved funding of £947,211 to support the delivery of the Spaceport 1 enabling infrastructure project. Having already undertaken a full procurement exercise for the construction of the enabling infrastructure, HIE's decision allowed the Comhairle to award the contract to the successful bidder - Macaulay Askernish Ltd (MAL).
- 6.2 Having discharged the various 'pre-construction' planning conditions, MAL moved onto site on 18 November 2024 and work was completed on 18 April 2025. Whilst work was ongoing at Scolpaig Farm, Openreach installed superfast broadband between the MCA Station at Balemartin, North Uist to the entrance to Scolpaig Farm.
- 6.3 Macaulay Askernish Ltd were responsible for:
 - Creating a designated area at the Farm complex for vehicle turning, storage and parking
 - Upgrading the culvert / causeway between 'upper' and 'lower' Loch Scolpaig
 - Upgrading the length of the access track from the A865 and creating four new laybys
 - Building a new access track between the existing farm buildings and the launch pad
 - Installing fencing throughout the site
 - Installing a visibility splay and public parking area at the entrance to the site

- 6.4 During the delivery of the contract, some budgetary savings were identified which enabled the scope of work to be amended to include extending the length of the new section of access road and levelling out the area where the launch pad will be located.
- 6.5 The Construction Project Manager / Principal Designer for the Comhairle issued a certificate of completion on 25 April 2025.

HABITAT AND AMENITY MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Condition 23 has been applied by the Planning Authority to ensure that provision is made for the enhancement of biodiversity and the appropriate management (including recreational and public access) of the land at Scolpaig Farm. It specifies that:

'No use of the spaceport shall take place until a detailed Habitat and Amenity Management Plan (HAMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

The HAMP shall specify:

- *Arrangements and timescales for consultation and delivery mechanisms for the ongoing management and maintenance of the site in the long-term;*
- *An Otter Protection and Monitoring Plan, a Corncrake Habitat Management Plan and a Breeding Bird Protection Plan, which shall include mitigation measures for launch events, the provision of nesting boxes and specify speed limits within the site;*
- *The establishment and membership of the Advisory Steering Group;*
- *The enhancement of habitat biodiversity within the wider Scolpaig Farm site;*
- *The provision of and improvements to recreational and public access to the site, including the rerouting of the footpath and arrangements for access between and during launch campaign periods, and during launch events, with provision of temporary signage and markers, as required; and*
- *Arrangements for the periodic review of the HAMP*

The site shall be operated in full accordance with the HAMP as approved for the lifetime of the development.'

- 7.2 Since Scolpaig Farm came into Comhairle ownership, much work has been undertaken to understand its environmental, cultural and social value. During the Planning process, strong views were expressed on the importance of Scolpaig Farm to the local community and to visitors. The development of the HAMP and the establishment of the Steering Group is an opportunity for the community and key stakeholders to participate in future developments which protect, conserve and enhance Scolpaig Farm.
- 7.3 Environmental consultancy, Atlantic58 is leading on the Habitat and Amenity Management workstream. Breeding bird and emergent bat surveys commenced in April and May 2025 respectively and will continue throughout Summer 2025. The results of these surveys – together the pre-construction surveys and the breadth of assessments undertaken to inform the Environmental Impact Assessment and Supplementary Environmental Information - will inform the HAMP (as well as the various licences which must be obtained before any space flight activity can take place).

- 7.4 Whilst surveys are ongoing, it is proposed to undertake public consultation to establish the views of the community on what developments they would like to see at Scolpaig Farm. A variety of mediums will be used, including an online survey (with hard copies available locally) and walking transects or other such on-site events.
- 7.5 In terms of membership of the Advisory Steering Group, whilst that this may naturally evolve over time, it is suggested that in order to establish the Group, representatives be invited from the following organisations:
- Spaceport 1 Operator
 - NatureScot
 - North Uist Community Council
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 - Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath
 - North Uist Estate
 - Scottish Crofting Federation
 - NHS Eilean Siar
 - Highlands and Islands Enterprise
 - Outer Hebrides Tourism
- 7.6 Members are asked to consider the Comhairle's representation on the HAMP Steering Group. It is suggested it would be appropriate for both Comhairle Members from the Uibhist a Tuath ward to represent the Comhairle interests as landowner and 'developer' of the Spaceport 1 project. Support for Members and the Steering Group will be provided by Comhairle Officers as required.
- 7.7 There must be a measured approach to future developments at Scolpaig, balancing all the 'assets' and current and potential uses of the site. Using access as an example –if work is done to make Scolpaig more attractive for recreational purposes, it may be necessary to put in place visitor management mitigation to ensure that the ecological integrity of the site is protected.
- 7.8 Atlantic58 will work over the coming period to draft an outline HAMP and a Terms of Reference for the Steering Group. It is anticipated that the first meeting will take place in September 2025 following conclusion of the ecological studies and the collation of the results of the public consultation.

PRIORITIES FOR QUARTERS 2 AND 3, 2025/26

- 8.1 In addition to the Habitat and Amenity Management workstream, several other strands of activity will be taken forward over the next period.
- 8.2 The first iteration of the Full Business Case (FBC) was submitted to and reviewed by the Scottish Government's Islands Deal team in early 2025. The second version is due to be submitted at the end of May 2025 and reviewed as soon as possible thereafter.
- 8.3 Work to secure the permanent Airspace Change is ongoing and the application is at stage five of seven. At the time of writing, the application was sitting with the Secretary of State for Transport for her consideration as to whether to determine the application or refer it back to the Civil Aviation for their determination. It is hoped that a verbal update will be available at the meeting of the Committee.
- 8.4 Once the timeline for determination of the Spaceport 1 Airspace Change application is understood, a Future Contract Opportunity for the operation of Spaceport 1 will be advertised. This will be closely followed by the publication of an invitation to tender as per the Comhairle's Contract Regulations.
- 8.5 A brief has been developed for the procurement of a suitably qualified and experienced external consultant to take forward the Scolpaig Farm Cultural Heritage Strategy and Implementation Plan. The

focus of this piece of work is to develop short, medium and long-term priorities for the conservation and preservation or redevelopment of the cultural heritage assets on the site (such as the Farmhouse and outbuildings).

CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Spaceport 1 project is in the final stage of development, and the completion of the enabling infrastructure has been received well by prospective users of the spaceport. Being able to evidence the considerable progress that has been made to-date will be particularly important during the procurement of the spaceport operator, not least as it significantly de-risks the venture for the private sector.
- 9.2 Successful implementation of the Spaceport 1 project will see the creation of new jobs and training opportunities, will provide the opportunity for local businesses to diversify and grow and inspire new business start-ups. The users of Spaceport 1 will bring additionality to the economy throughout the year and will bolster operations at Hebrides Range. Spaceport 1 therefore has the potential to make a significant contribution to the economic prospects of Uist.
- 9.3 Development of the HAMP and HAMP Steering Group is a critical next step. Doing so will bring together the range of interests in Scolpaig Farm to focus on opportunities to improve the site for the benefit of the community and the environment.