

Green Freeport Quarterly

Together, realising our potential

Inverness &
Cromarty Firth
Green Freeport

a free trade zone

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Port of Nigg



Update from the Chief Executive

AS WE LOOK BACK ON 2025 IN THIS EDITION OF OUR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER, IT'S HARD NOT TO FEEL A REAL SENSE OF PRIDE IN HOW FAR INVERNESS AND CROMARTY FIRTH GREEN FREEPORT HAS COME IN A RELATIVELY SHORT SPACE OF TIME, MADE POSSIBLE BY THE SHARED COMMITMENT, EFFORT AND ENTHUSIASM OF OUR PARTNERS. THIS HAS BEEN A YEAR OF MAJOR MILESTONES.

Our Full Business Case was formally signed off, and we concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the UK and Scottish Governments and Highland Council. This was an important moment that brought years of planning, partnership and ambition into sharp focus.

Alongside this, our team has grown, bringing in new skills and capacity to support the scale of opportunity ahead. You'll find out more about our latest recruit – our innovation intern Joseph Quance – elsewhere in this edition.

We've also been working hard to raise the profile of our Green Freeport at home and abroad, and it's been encouraging to see the Highlands increasingly on the radar of organisations looking to locate, invest and grow here. There is a real sense of momentum building.

When people talk about investment, the most visible signs tend to be new buildings, expanding ports and people we know who may have secured jobs at places like the Sumitomo Electric cable factory at Port of Nigg. But we're often asked what the Green Freeport means for communities more broadly, particularly for people who may not work directly in offshore wind or the energy sector. One of the most significant ways benefits will be shared across the region is through a funding mechanism unique to the Green Freeport model – the proposed retained non-domestic rates fund.

In simple terms, as new infrastructure is developed within the Green Freeport tax sites, a proportion of business rates generated is retained locally instead of going to government and set aside for reinvestment. These funds will be administered by Highland Council, with priorities agreed through strong governance involving both the local authority and the Green Freeport Board. The aim of the fund is to maximise long-term, sustainable and inclusive economic benefit across the Highlands. This could mean investment in things that really matter to communities, from new affordable housing and skills development initiatives to regeneration projects that strengthen local places and facilities.

It's important to be clear about timescales. As we've said previously, these are not immediate benefits and they won't happen overnight. We don't expect the fund to begin accumulating until later in 2026 and even then, only at a small percentage of its full potential. However, looking ahead over the next decade, projections suggest the fund could grow to as much as £20 million per year.

This represents a powerful opportunity to support vital community infrastructure and help ensure that the economic growth we are working towards translates into lasting social value that benefits all of us. Getting this

right will depend on listening carefully and making a shared commitment to fairness and transparency, and where local plans have been developed by communities, we will use them to inform our thinking. The fund is currently being discussed by the Green Freeport Board and Highland councillors, and we look forward to sharing future updates.

As we write this edition, we've also just had the welcome announcement of Allocation Round 7 (AR7), signalling significant new opportunities for offshore wind projects. It's a positive way to start the year and reinforces the scale of opportunity ahead for the Highlands. Our focus now is on making sure that as this sector grows and the benefits are felt widely, not just in investment figures, but in stronger communities, new skills and more opportunities for people across our region.

CALUM MACPHERSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ICFGF



Local businesses stepping into global opportunities

As the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport gathers momentum, its impact is already being felt across the Highlands – not only through major infrastructure investment, but through the growing strength of the local supply chain supporting these developments.

Inverness-based civil engineering firm Hill-Tec is one example of how Highland businesses are well placed to grow as the Green Freeport attracts new opportunities to the region. Founded four years ago by managing director Duncan MacPherson, Hill-Tec supports major infrastructure, renewable energy and industrial developments across the Highlands.

Duncan said recent investment linked to the Green Freeport has had a direct impact on the business.

"The investment into the Sumitomo Electric UK cable factory at Port of Nigg, alongside the wider Green Freeport vision, has had a genuinely tangible impact on our business. As a direct result of these projects, I've gone from working on my own to being able to take on two new employees, expand our service offering and invest in training and development," he explained.

"People don't always make the connection between these big investment announcements and what they mean beyond the jobs that are created on site. But they create a ripple effect across the area – our story is living proof of that."

Green Freeport status has already helped secure major investment, including Sumitomo Electric UK's subsea cable manufacturing facility at Port of Nigg. The new facility is due to open this year, creating around 150 on-site jobs and further opportunities for local suppliers.

Hill-Tec's work at the Sumitomo site involves close collaboration with international engineering teams.

Duncan said: *"Our team is now in daily contact with international engineering methods, global quality expectations and a wide mix of specialists from across Europe and beyond."*

"Our experience has reinforced our belief that world-class delivery is not something the Highlands should aspire to, but something we can achieve here and now."



Photo: Michael Carver





Q&A

Rory Kellet, ThreeSixty Architecture; Catriona Hill, Oberlanders;
Stuart Mackellar, LDN Architects.

Supporting sustainable growth through local design expertise



As part of our ambition to establish the ICFGF as a global hub for green energy, we are working with partners who combine creative excellence with a strong understanding of the Highlands. One such partner is the Northern Architecture Collaborative (NAC).

Q Who are they?

A Formed by three leading Scottish architectural practices and rooted in the Highlands, the collaborative delivers expert architectural and master planning support for complex developments across the UK and Europe. Their combined expertise supports the scale and ambition of projects being delivered across the Green Freeport, while ensuring new development responds positively to local landscapes, communities and planning requirements.

Q How do their products or services support businesses looking to invest, build or expand in the Green Freeport?

A Large-scale investment in green energy and infrastructure requires careful planning, sustainable design and a clear long-term vision. By pooling their skills and resources, the NAC provides investors and developers with access to a locally based team that has the scale, technical expertise and regional knowledge needed to navigate the unique challenges of building in the Highlands.

Q What sets their business apart?

A The NAC brings together a wide range of skills and technical specialists, allowing projects to be supported from concept through to completion under one roof. Their combined expertise ensures Green Freeport developments are delivered with coordination and confidence.

Q How do they contribute to the wider highland economy, community or sustainability goals?

A Sustainability is central to their approach. Through a shared Sustainable Design Ethos, the collaborative focuses on creating sustainable, low carbon developments that are energy efficient, considerate of materials and designed for the wellbeing of the people that use them.

Just as importantly, the collaborative is committed to delivering benefits for local communities. Their work supports local supply chains, fair employment practices and the retention and attraction of skilled professionals to the region – helping to ensure that growth linked to the Green Freeport creates lasting value across the Highlands.

By working with partners like the Northern Architecture Collaborative, we are helping to shape development that is ambitious and innovative, while remaining firmly rooted in local knowledge, sustainability and community benefit.



Meet the team

WE'RE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME JOSEPH QUANCE AS OUR NEW ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION INTERN.

Originally from Essex, Joseph studied Environmental Science at the University of York, specialising in water quality analysis. After a challenging final year at university, including the loss of his dad in January 2024, he was keen to focus on work that feels meaningful and makes a positive impact.

Joseph has recently moved to the Highlands, drawn by the incredible landscapes and friendly communities. With a strong academic background, practical experience, and great people skills, Joseph brings plenty of enthusiasm to the role.

Over the next six months, Joseph will be mapping current and emerging green innovation projects across the Green Freeport area, focusing on those already underway or nearing delivery. This will help identify areas where collaboration, investment and support can have the greatest impact.

Joseph will share his findings with key stakeholders, helping demonstrate why the Highlands is such a strong place for clean energy investment and how local innovation can support the Green Freeport's long-term plans. His role also highlights the type of talent the Highlands can attract and retain, and the pathways into meaningful green careers here in the region.

"I can't wait to meet new people, learn from the community, understand the opportunities emerging across the Highlands, and contribute to projects that make a real difference," said Joseph.



Joseph Quance, Environmental Innovation Intern



Investing in safer roads for our communities

IMPROVING LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS A KEY PART OF OUR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES AND ENABLING FUTURE GROWTH. ONE IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF THIS GROWTH IS THE PROPOSED UPGRADE OF THE A9 TOMICH JUNCTION NEAR INVERGORDON – A PROJECT THAT WILL BE SUPPORTED FINANCIALLY BY THE GREEN FREEPORT.

This stretch of road is well known locally as a busy and challenging junction, with a long history of safety concerns for residents and road users. Working closely with the Highland Council, plans are being developed to replace the existing staggered junction with a new four arm roundabout, helping to improve safety and traffic flow.

The upgrade will also play an important role in supporting future Green Freeport activity, helping the road network accommodate increased traffic movements linked to infrastructure developments at the Port of Cromarty Firth.

Around £2 million from our £25 million seed funding from the UK has been earmarked to support this project. This is one of many projects that has been allocated a share of our seed funding, reflecting our wider aim to deliver infrastructure improvements that benefit local people, enhance safety, and support sustainable economic growth.

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Highland businesses recognised for role in Green Freeport supply chain



Four Highland businesses already playing an important role in the ICFGF supply chain have been selected to take part in a globally recognised international enterprise development programme.

Serimax, ILM Highland, Ri-Crudon and Helica (Scotland) Ltd have been chosen to join Shell LiveWire, a fully funded programme designed to help small and medium-sized businesses accelerate growth, build resilience and compete in the rapidly evolving clean energy market. Together, the four companies represent a broad range of sectors, including engineering, recycling, renewables and construction consultancy, reflecting the depth and diversity of expertise emerging across the Green Freeport supply chain.

Delivered by Shell UK in partnership with business support organisation Elevator, the programme offers tailored one-to-one coaching, specialist masterclasses, strategic planning support and pitch development. This practical approach helps participating businesses strengthen their foundations while preparing for future opportunities at a national and international level.

Alison Wilson, Investment and Development Manager at ICFGF, said the Green Freeport sees the Highland companies' inclusion as another sign of the region's growing capability, confidence and emerging leadership in clean energy development as the energy transition accelerates. It is hoped that a cohort formed exclusively of ICFGF supply chain businesses can be created in future.

She said: "The Green Freeport aims to help local enterprises grow, compete and benefit from the opportunities emerging through the energy transition. The participation of Highland businesses in international initiatives like Shell LiveWire underscores the growing importance of the Highlands in delivering the UK's net zero ambitions."

"As the Green Freeport continues to attract investment and new long-term industrial activity, it remains focused on ensuring the benefits are shared across the local business community and the wider Highland economy."



Members of the Shell LiveWire Programme UK Cohort with the delivery team from Shell and Elevator.