

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

19th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
20 December 2023

PE2054: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist

Petitioner	Colin G Anderson
Petition summary	<p>Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport development on Scolpaig Farm focused on examining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• whether there is any conflict of interest for Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) as the authority who approved the plans and are taking the project forward;• the process for purchasing the land on Scolpaig;• potential errors and omissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposal; and• the economic case for pursuing this project.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PP4031

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 9 October 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition can collect signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 537 signatures have been received on this petition.

5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.
7. The Committee has also received submissions from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and Angus McNab. These can be found in **Annexe E**.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2054: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist

Petitioner

Colin G Anderson

Date lodged

9 October 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport development on Scolpaig Farm focused on examining:

- whether there is any conflict of interest for Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) as the authority who approved the plans and are taking the project forward;
- the process for purchasing the land on Scolpaig;
- potential errors and omissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposal; and
- the economic case for pursuing this project.

Previous action

I have written to the Scottish Government requesting the application be called in for conflict of interest, lack of transparency, and unclear business case. This request was declined.

I asked Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for the business plan, and noted an error in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) concerning CO2 emissions. The Planning Department acknowledged the EIA error but deemed it insignificant. I have not received the business plan.

Background information

The proposed Scolpaig Spaceport is hugely controversial and has attracted little public support, with hundreds of written objections submitted to the consultation.

Although public objections outweighed support by roughly 45:1, the Western Isles Council is continuing to pursue the project, claiming it will create jobs and that the economic benefits outweigh the environmental harm. This is far from clear as the project is surrounded by secrecy, and the economic case is simply unknown.

Spaceport 1 partner QinetiQ have stated “it is extremely difficult to predict at this juncture the demand for the Spaceport over the next 10 years.” [CAA website](#).

It is my view that the planning process was flawed, with initially no EIA, then an EIA with significant errors. There is a perception that Spaceport 1 is being fast-tracked in a way that effectively limits public scrutiny. An independent review is urgently needed.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe (The Information Centre) is a purple rounded rectangle. The text 'SPICe' is in white, with 'SPIC' in a larger font and 'e' in a smaller font. To the right of 'SPICe', the text 'The Information Centre' is in white, and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' is in a smaller white font below it.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on PE2054: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist, submitted by Colin G Anderson

Background

Spaceport 1, to be located on the north-west coast of North Uist in the Outer Hebrides, is a rocket launching site for [sub-orbital sounding rockets](#). The project is being led by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES), which bought the spaceport site, previously part of Scolpaig Farm, for £1m. CnES is developing the spaceport in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, QinetiQ, Rhea Group and Commercial Space Technologies. The first rocket launch from Spaceport 1 is expected during 2024.

Detailed project documentation is not currently available online, as CnES [suffered a significant cyber-attack](#) on Tuesday 7 November 2023.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government [issued a direction](#) to all Scottish planning authorities on 10 June 2020, which required any authority receiving a planning application for a new spaceport related development to notify Scottish Ministers. The aim being to provide Scottish Ministers with a national overview of potential spaceport developments.

Following receipt of such a notification from CnES for the Spaceport 1 development, Scottish Ministers [issued a direction to the authority on 4 March 2022](#). This required CnES to notify Scottish Ministers if it were

mind to award planning permission for the proposed development. Following notification, Scottish Ministers would consider whether to “call-in” the application for their own decision or return the application to CnES.

[CnES agreed to award](#) the Spaceport 1 development planning permission on 23 June 2023, subject to the requirement to notify Scottish Ministers. Scottish Ministers [advised CnES on 24 July 2023](#) that it would not call-in the application, meaning the CnES decision to award planning permission stood and that the development could proceed.

Scottish Parliament Action

To date, the Scottish Parliament has not considered the development of Spaceport 1 in any detail.

Alan Rehfisch
Senior Researcher
21 November 2023

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 6 November 2023

PE2054/A: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist

The Scottish Government is pleased to offer the Committee our views on the action called for in the above petition, specifically:

- *whether there is any conflict of interest for Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) as the authority who approved the plans and are taking the project forward;*
- *the process for purchasing the land on Scolpaig;*
- *potential errors and omissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposal; and*
- *the economic case for pursuing this project*

Background

On 11 June 2020 we issued a notification direction requiring planning authorities to alert us to new planning cases for spaceport related development - [The 'Town and Country Planning \(Notification of Applications\) \(Spaceport Related Developments\) \(Scotland\) Direction 2020](#). This allows us to have a national overview of development in the planning system that is spaceport related and offers us the opportunity to put in place additional safeguards, and intervene, if necessary.

Case specific notification directions for various spaceport related planning applications have also been put in place. A [case specific notification direction](#) was issued on 04 March 2022, requiring Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to notify this application to Scottish Ministers if they were minded to grant planning consent. The notification requirement gives Ministers the opportunity to decide whether there are national interests at stake which would merit Ministers calling in the application for their own determination or to allow the Council to issue the decision at local level.

On 20 June 2023, the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Planning Applications Board agreed with planning officials' recommendation to grant planning permission for this application subject to conditions. The application was duly notified to the Scottish Ministers on 27 June 2023. Ministers gave full and proper consideration to the case. It was considered that all relevant matters had been taken into account by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and that it did not merit call-in by the Scottish Ministers. On 24 July 2023 the application was cleared back to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for its determination. The Comhairle granted planning permission for the project on 26 July 2023.

The primary responsibility for the operation of the planning system and service lies with the local planning authority. They are best placed to make decisions about matters which affect their areas. But there can be some occasions when the Scottish Government will become involved in the planning application process. Planning legislation requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In reaching a decision the planning authority is expected to have regard to all material factors, including views from consultees and representations submitted to them. All information pertaining to the handling of the application by the Comhairle can be accessed here: [Planning Authority ref: 21/00646/PPD](#).

The Scottish Ministers have a general power to intervene in the determination of a planning application and call in an application to take on the decision-making role themselves. In practice, they exercise this power sparingly, recognising and respecting the important role of local authorities in making decisions on the future development of their areas. All information pertaining to the handling of the application by the Scottish Government including our planning assessment report can be accessed here: [Scottish Government Ref: NOD-410-001](#).

We understand that the Comhairle have proactively contacted the committee directly about the petition and have provided responses to the claims set out in Mr Anderson's petition. We understand that the Comhairle have also offered to facilitate a meeting to provide an overview on the Spaceport 1 Project.

Our response to each of the points in the petition is set out below.

- *whether there is any conflict of interest for Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) as the authority who approved the plans and are taking the project forward;*

The Planning Minister was provided with advice to support a decision in the form of a submission from officials containing relevant information about the application including the planning assessment report. The submission noted that the planning authority was also the applicant. It is not uncommon that a council may require to determine a planning application in which it has an ownership or other interest in the land. The Scottish Government addresses this issue within Planning Advice Note 82: Local authority interest developments and Circular 3/2009: Notification of planning applications, which states that this in itself is not unreasonable, in fact it is quite normal and occurs regularly. In these circumstances though, it is essential that the planning authority does not allow any possible conflict of interests to have an undue influence on its planning assessment.

- *the process for purchasing the land on Scolpaig;*

The process that led to the land purchase is a matter for the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Planning is concerned with the appropriateness of land use.

- *potential errors and omissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposal; and*

In determining a planning application, the planning authority can only take into account the information available to it, at the time. We note that it is the Comhairle's view that while the figures in the Airport Change Process (ACP) Options Appraisal document vary from those in the EIA, the resulting effect on climate change would not alter significantly and these figures would not have changed the planning assessment of the issue, or the weight given, or alter the overall assessment in the planning balance.

- *the economic case for pursuing this project*

The Scottish Government has identified space as a key economic opportunity within the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), Inward Investment Plan and the recently published National Innovation Strategy. The Scottish Space Strategy developed in

partnership between industry, academia and government outlines our ambition to become a leading European Space nation and capture a £4 billion share of the global space market and 20,000 jobs in the sector over the next decade. The provision of launch capability is a key component that will provide Scotland with the full end-to-end solution for small satellites. The Scottish Government is supportive *in principle* of space projects that will contribute towards this ambition and deliver economic benefits to the local region.

I hope this reply is helpful to the Committee's consideration of the petition.

Planning Decisions

Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Division

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 3 December 2023

PE2054/B: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist

Background

I was frankly astonished when I first heard of the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES) plans to develop a spaceport at Scolpaig, a location I know very well as a long-term visitor to North Uist. I formally objected to the proposals on environmental grounds, as did over 600 others from on and off the island. Many of them wrote detailed and well-informed letters of objection, the gist of which was that the proposal was highly inappropriate and insensitive, and the level and quality of objection indicated that many islanders and visitors placed a high value on the environment at Scolpaig. Formal objections outnumbered support by a factor of over 45:1.

Despite this the Comhairle continued to pursue the spaceport proposal on the grounds that it would create local jobs, and that economic benefit would outweigh environmental harm. They continued to do so even after Scolpaig was rejected as a polar satellite launching site, the original justification for the location. The manner in which the Comhairle subsequently progressed the project, however, suggested they acted precipitately at times; public scrutiny was unfairly limited; the planning department seemed on occasions less than impartial; and the economic benefits of the project were apparently taken for granted, requiring no evidence. Requests were made to the Scottish Government to call in the proposal, but it was approved almost without comment, and in a very short time.

Conflict of interest/land purchase

1. The public were not consulted on the plans to develop Scolpaig as a spaceport until after the Comhairle had purchased the land and submitted their initial planning application. These actions were in

direct contravention of [PAN 82 guidelines](#) regarding public consultation, e.g. that an authority's intentions should be "clearly known from the outset, allowing for any necessary public debate and scrutiny of local authority proposals".

2. When the Comhairle's original plan to launch satellites from Scolpaig was shelved they continued to pursue the site for suborbital rocket work, but with no rigorous justification. Scolpaig has no unique attributes for suborbital rocket launching. The Comhairle's actions again contravene PAN 82, e.g. site selection "must be rigorous and transparent, so that it can be clearly demonstrated that choices have been made solely in the interests of proper planning."
3. The Comhairle reissued an amended planning application in 2022 as a 'new' proposal, although the works described were very similar in scope to the previous version. As a consequence, the 600+ formal objections to the original proposal were nullified, and the accompanying written submissions removed from the CnES online portal. This meant that the true strength of public objection to the spaceport was not fairly represented when the 'new' proposal was considered; and despite the voluminous EIA (running to many hundreds of online pages) that accompanied the proposal the public were given only 1 month to formally respond. There were nonetheless 244 written objections, and only 6 letters of support.

Errors and omissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

4. The Comhairle's EIA understated the CO₂ emissions associated with the spaceport by a factor of 30, as it neglected the impact of rerouting transatlantic air traffic. When this was pointed out to the planners their response was "the resulting effect on climate change would not alter significantly", and they declined to pass on the revised information to the Planning Committee. The spaceport impact, however, increases the Comhairle's annual CO₂ reduction obligations by 9% and in their response the planners seemingly changed the definition of 'significance' from *local* to *global* impact, contravening CnES policy "to achieve zero direct emissions from our own assets and services and reduce the Comhairle's carbon footprint as much as possible". The planners' actions did not seem properly impartial.

5. In response to the EIA, the RSPB recommended that, in order to protect vulnerable species, rocket launching should not be carried out at Scolpaig during the bird breeding season. This condition was, however, rejected by the CnES planners on the grounds that it would adversely affect the spaceport business case. The RSPB were publicly unhappy about the outcome, and the planners' action again seemed less than impartial.

Scottish Government submission

6. The Government advised that "Ministers gave full and proper consideration to the case". This might lead the public to believe that there was a significant level of scrutiny of the proposal among relevant Ministerial departments. In fact, only one Minister was involved in the review, and no committees; and despite the huge volume of information accompanying the EIA, the Minister approved the Comhairle's plans less than one month after receiving them.
7. Remarking on errors in the EIA (see above) the Government submission noted "the planning authority can only take into account the information available to it at the time." Ministers, however, were given the opportunity to review the proposal in detail, at which point the EIA should have been properly scrutinised to protect the public interest, particularly on issues as important as ecology and climate change impact.

The economic case

8. The Government submission states that it is supportive 'in principle' of space projects that will deliver local economic benefits. Neither they nor the Comhairle, however, have provided evidence of a credible economic case for Scolpaig. The Comhairle is seeking £3.3M of public funds, but despite repeated requests for information the business plan remains confidential. No private investment has been reported.
9. Recent comments by Spaceport 1 participants are not encouraging regarding the economic benefits, e.g., "the suborbital market is not a market where you can get big profits" ([Rhea Talk Webinars 28/06/2022](#)); "It is extremely difficult to predict at this juncture the demand for the Spaceport over the next 10 years." (QinetiQ, in submission to the CAA, 11/05/23). In the absence of any firm information from CnES these statements paint a different picture to that presented in the planning application.

In summary, there is little evidence that the economic case for the spaceport outweighs the environmental harm; and the process that led to its approval fell far short of what the public expect in terms of transparency at either local or central government level. Remarkably, the Scolpaig proposal – to develop a tranquil rural location into a facility to launch rockets into space – was never considered as a major planning application, with the higher level of public consultation that entails. I would invite the Petitions Committee to consider all these points.

As a final point, the Government submission states that the Comhairle have “offered to facilitate a meeting to provide an overview on the Spaceport 1 Project.” While this is welcome, I am not aware of this offer or to whom it has been made.

Annexe E

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submission of 12 December 2023

PE2054/C: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar ('the Comhairle') has led the development of Spaceport 1 (SP1) since 2017. From the outset, project delivery has been supported by a diverse team of consultants with extensive knowledge and expertise in a variety of fields including space launch and environmental impact assessments.

'Conflict of Interest'

As per Planning Advice Note 82, the application was assessed impartially and with the same level of scrutiny as would be afforded to an application by any other applicant. Planning officers are bound by relevant professional codes of conduct in this regard.

The application was the subject of consultation with a significant number of specialist and statutory bodies, and independent advice from consultants was also obtained by the Planning Service.

The application was subject to a notification direction. As such, Scottish Ministers were notified that the Comhairle was minded to approve the application and had the option to 'call in' the application for their determination.

It was considered that the proposal did not raise any issues that required a decision to be taken at a national level. Subsequently, the application was cleared back to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for its determination.

Purchase of Scolpaig Farm

At the meeting of the Comhairle's Policy & Resources Committee on 12 December 2018, it was agreed 'to purchase the Scolpaig Farm site, as per the decision of the Comhairle in February 2018, on such terms as the Chief Executive shall determine'. Advice was provided throughout by the [District Valuer Service](#) of the Valuation Office Agency. At that time,

failing to secure the land was one of the key risks to the success of the SP1 project and to realising the economic benefits space launch activity will bring.

The Economic Case

The business case was developed with input from space launch companies with which the Comhairle has non-disclosure agreements and as such, is commercially confidential and sensitive. Disclosure would prejudice the commercial interests of these companies and would be detrimental in terms of their future use of SP1.

A Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) – informed by elements of the business case and financial forecasts - was submitted as part of the planning submission. The Planning Authority had the SEIA independently reviewed and consequently, it was revised and resubmitted in February 2023 for further consideration.

The Comhairle has clear policies and procedures in place for the effective scrutiny of its activities, this includes Audit Scotland, the national auditor.

The petitioner references a statement by QinetiQ from a document which had been submitted to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) as part of stage two of the seven-stage Airspace Change Proposal (ACP) process:

“It is extremely difficult to predict at this juncture the demand for the Spaceport over the next 10 years”.

This statement, in the context of airspace, is correct. It is indeed impossible for us to predict at this stage when airspace will be required, by whom and under what parameters.

However, applying this statement to suggest that there is no economic justification for taking the project forward is erroneous and misleading. Business development activity has been ongoing for several years to secure a credible pipeline of business for SP1. Market research has also been conducted and revisited as part of the iterative refinement of the business plan.

Potential errors & omissions in the Environmental Impact Assessment

Space launch activity is regulated by a number of regimes, each of which has its own information requirements, assessment stages and

procedures. Planning Permission is but one such regulatory regime and in determining an application, the planning authority can only consider the information available to it, at the time. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Supplementary Environmental Information report submitted as part of the planning application, were the subject of extensive consultation with specialist and statutory bodies.

The planning assessment acknowledged that the proposal would contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and that this would therefore have an adverse effect in terms of climate change. Significant weight was given to that harm in the overall 'planning balance' that informed the recommendation to the Planning Applications Board.

The ACP options appraisal report referenced contains an initial high-level, 'worst case' estimate of possible climate change impacts, based on a range of assumptions. It was produced as part of stage two of the seven-stage ACP process. The report suggests a possible increase in CO₂ of 413 tonnes per-annum, caused by the re-routing of Commercial Air Transport (CAT). Based on this, the increase referred to for the re-routing, would equate to that of about 236 cars per-annum. The high-level assessment contained in the report anticipates that the impacts due to the re-routing of CAT are likely to be low, for the reasons set out within that report.

A full assessment, supported by rigorous evidence, has been submitted to the CAA as is required under stage three of the ACP process. Stakeholder and community consultation on this assessment begins in January 2024. Concerns on potential impacts can be made to the CAA who will scrutinise the proposed airspace design and operation to ensure best use and minimum impact.

While the figures in the initial appraisal report vary from those in the EIA, the Planning Authority has stated that the resulting effect on climate change would not alter significantly and these figures would not have changed the planning assessment of the issue, the significant weight given to the harm identified, or alter the overall assessment in the planning balance.

'There is already a rocket launching site at the Hebrides Range'

[MOD Hebrides Range](#) is a military facility, owned by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and operated by QinetiQ under the terms of the Long-Term Partnering Agreement (LTPA). The facility has specific functions

relating to defence and neither MOD nor QinetiQ wish to facilitate commercial space launch activity from Hebrides Range.

Angus MacNab submission of 13 December 2023

PE2054/D: Establish an independent review into the proposed Spaceport 1 development at Scolpaig Farm in North Uist

I am a resident of North Uist, and our family home is the nearest residential property to the proposed spaceport development at Scolpaig Farm (870m from the proposed launch pad). In relation to Petition No. PE2054, I draw your attention to the following:

BACKGROUND

CnES first applied, as Developer, on 27th June 2019, for consent to develop a spaceport at Scolpaig Farm, North Uist. This application was for Phase 1 of a multi-phase development, Spaceport 1, ultimately intended for the orbital launch of small satellites. Phase 1 covered the launch of sub-orbital (sounding) rockets.

The application was submitted without any public consultation, although this had been promised by CnES in the preceding months, and was missing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) – a statutory requirement. The application was also submitted after CnES had purchased Scolpaig Farm for the purposes of the spaceport. It was evident that CnES did not intend to comply with the planning requirements that they would necessarily, and properly, impose on others. In a public representation a Chartered Town Planner described it as the worst application he had ever seen.

A substantial number of representations were submitted by the public in objection to the proposal, forcing CnES to hold public meetings through August and September 2019. Given their timing, these were essentially informative rather than consultative. The application remained extant, but stalled, until withdrawn on 7th February, 2022, when a new application was submitted, this time with EIA. The new application was effectively for the same change of land use and infrastructure provision

as the original application, and stated use again the launch of sub-orbital (sounding) rockets.

LACK OF CONSULTATION

The first meaningful liaison by CnES with the public was at a North Uist Community Council (NUCC) meeting in January 2019, when CnES gave a presentation, noting that full public consultation would be held before Easter that year. At a (restricted) meeting in April 2019 attended by CnES, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), and the Spaceport 1 Project Manager, they advised that “the intended public consultation meetings had been delayed due to the Easter holiday period, but were to be organised and held soon.” At an NUCC meeting on 24 June there was no update in respect of Spaceport 1; three days later CnES submitted the first planning application. This despite the NUCC chairperson being a Local Councillor (and other Councillors being on the NUCC Committee).

PLANNING APPLICATION DEFICIENCIES

The initial planning drawings included a “red line” boundary keeping the area below the 2ha threshold for Major Development, which would have triggered a 12-week public consultation period. CnES gave only 21 days in which to submit representations. Before the second planning application there was again very little consultation: one short online presentation, with Q&A session, was held in November 2021, primarily to disseminate information. It was poorly advertised and consequently relatively poorly attended.

BIAS

There are indications that the consent for this proposed development was effectively a “done deal” from the outset:

- CnES first applying for consent without going through due process, in significant breach of the requirements of PAN 82 (Local Authority Interest Developments).
- CnES spending borrowed money to purchase Scolpaig Farm before submitting a planning application, and presumably spending considerable sums on consultancy fees since: it is hard to believe the application could be determined in-house without an element of bias, conscious or otherwise.
- CnES stating that representations against their first application would not be considered in respect of the second application, as it was wholly new; conversely, that issues such as site selection (see below)

were already covered in the original application so required no new information.

- The absence of a professional Planning Consultant’s input to the planning process and management of the EIA, which would have picked up on the numerous anomalies and errors (some serious) in the EIA Report.
- Before the determination of the application, the Scottish Government publishing NPF4 (February 2023): “*This includes plans for an Outer Hebrides Spaceport 1 in Scolpaig, North Uist*”. And [Richard Lochhead’s 27 April statement](#) that spaceports in Sutherland and Shetland, “...*will be followed by substantial suborbital activity in the Western Isles*”.

FAILURE TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE SITES

The 2017 Sceptre Report considered six satellite launching sites including Scolpaig, but commented unfavourably on the latter: “*it is not possible to launch to Sun–Synchronous Orbits while meeting the FAA–AST casualty rate requirement...and the trajectories to polar orbit are highly constrained resulting in lower payload mass.*”

- With Scolpaig rejected as a satellite launching site a completely new search should have been carried out for sub-orbital launch sites. Many sites in Scotland are suitable, with launch trajectory nominally to the west.
- When the second planning application was submitted in February 2022 for sub-orbital launch only, it still included the original trajectories. QinetiQ later claimed to the CAA that “*Although the requirement for orbital launch to the North has been removed, there remains a requirement to be able to conduct certain sub-orbital launches to the North*”. No explanation was given.

SECRECY

There has been significant secrecy around CnES’s intentions for Scolpaig. Their Local Development Plan (LDP) was published in November 2018, only 7 months before the first planning application, but makes no reference to spaceport development in the Western Isles. This despite:

- At least three Economic Impact Assessments from 2015 onwards being prepared for HIE (a CnES Consortium member) for such use of the Scolpaig site.

- A “Feasibility Study of Orbital Launch Trajectories from Scolpaig” prepared by Commercial Space Technologies Ltd. (CnES Consortium member) in 2016.
- The Sceptre Report (2017) prepared for HIE by DEIMOS, to assess potential small satellite vertical launch sites, including Scolpaig.
- A Scoping Report commissioned and prepared by professional consultancy Atkins (2018) for CnES.
- In summer 2022, an American visiting QinetiQ on business commented that Spaceport 1 “would be going ahead” (or words to that effect) and that planning consent would not be a stumbling block.

CONCLUSIONS

It is reasonable to conclude that CnES failed to properly follow the democratic planning process. This development should be reviewed, and the planning application/consent reconsidered. As well as issues of bias and lack of adequate consultation, secrecy remains around the project. For a controversial development in a rare and environmentally sensitive site, and one of historical importance, this is unacceptable; if it involves foreign interests, it is absolutely unacceptable.