

# Initiative gives Eric a new goal

**FORMER** Wick Academy player Eric Larnach used to create lots of openings for his team-mates with his fancy footwork down the wing. In his new off-field role, the 49-year-old will be looking to make the same impact in terms of breathing new life into his home area.

Eric's goal is to kick-start fresh community-backed schemes under the Initiative at the Edge programme.

As the newly-appointed development officer for south-east Caithness, he is to spend the next two-and-a-half years working alongside local organisations to help them get their plans off the drawing board.

He will be working to a blueprint being prepared by a steering group which was set up in February.

Eric said: "I'll be working to help take forward the development plan.

"Just now there's a wish list of about 40 possible projects but we should know which schemes are viable and should be taken further after the group's next meeting on June 28.

It's a case of prioritising the ones we think can be goers."

The programme cannot offer seed-corn funding itself but projects it supports are expected to get more favourable treatment from public grant-aid bodies.

South-east Caithness is among the latest areas to be included in the Government-backed programme which targets fragile, outlying rural communities. Among criteria used in its selection was its falling population and employment levels.

The coastal area covers two community councils around the main villages of Lybster and Dunbeath.

Eric, who is from Lybster, said he has a personal and family stake in the programme being a success.

"My heart is very much in what I'm doing as I live here and have brought up my family here."

The father-of-three is best known for his sporting prowess, not just in football but also in badminton and his ongoing passion for golf.

Eric has started work in Caithness Voluntary Group's base at Telford House, Wick, but is shortly to move to his own office in the Old Schoolhouse, Dunbeath, beside the village's heritage centre.

Steering group chairman Iain Gunn says he is delighted that a local person has been appointed to co-ordinate the programme. He said: "We're happy with the progress we are making and it promises to be an exciting period for the area."

Mr Gunn added that, while the group is funded to operate until October 2007, there is the possibility that it could be extended.

Interest was registered at a previous steering group meeting in making a community buy-out bid for Rumster Forest. Other schemes floated include an indoor sports venue in Lybster, a tennis court and play area in Dunbeath, improvements to the harbours at Lybster and Dunbeath, an upgraded bus service, the start-up of a local farm machinery ring, and improvements to Dunbeath's heritage trail.

