

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**GAELIC COMMITTEE - 12 March 2009**

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	G/10/09

**HIGHLAND FOLK MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT**

**Report by Director – Education, Culture and Sport Service**

**Summary**

This report presents a draft outline of a 20 year development plan for the Highland Folk Museum, created to develop the museum as a national centre for Gaelic culture, with Gaelic language and culture at the heart of the visitor experience. The report invites Members to comment on the plan and to recommend that the Education Culture and Sport Committee agree to its implementation and agree that the formal support in principal of key partner organisations is sought.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 In March 2008 Committee approved the visioning paper that outlined how Highland Folk Museum might develop as a national centre for Gaelic material and non material culture. That vision has been developed with the input of an informal working group of key stakeholders, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Cairngorms National Park Authority, University of the Highlands and Islands (including Sabhal Mòr Ostaig), National Museums of Scotland and National Library of Scotland. That group's recommendation was that, rather than sporadic individual injections of investment and related development, undertaken as and when possible, a phased 20 year plan should be created.
- 1.2 In summary, the vision is to create a place where our unique Gaelic language and culture is celebrated and shared. A place where people with little or no knowledge of Gaelic can get a sense of its relevance in shaping the Highlands of the past, present and future; a place where those interested in Gaelic culture or who are learning the language can explore, experiment and learn; a place where Gaelic speakers and their families can feel at home and enjoy a rewarding day out in the medium of Gaelic and a place where academics and tradition bearers can share and contribute.

**2. Progression**

- 2.1 Members previously endorsed a report presenting a consultant's research into how the interpretive methodologies at the museum might be developed to put Gaelic at the heart of the experience. It has been recognised that, for the museum to develop any further, capital development is also required and Council has previously agreed to close the Kingussie site and consolidate the museum on the Newtonmore site. £4million has been committed in the Education Culture and Sport capital plan for this purpose.
- A further piece of work was commissioned in autumn 2008 to identify what the physical requirements, in terms of capital infrastructure and business modelling. These two documents have informed the draft outline 20 year plan.

**3. Development Plan**

3.1 The outline 20 year development plan proposes 4 implementation phases of the vision, each of 5 years duration. This phased structure is guided by -

- Balancing the cultural aims of the development – putting Gaelic at the heart of the museum ethos and expanding the Gaelic interpretation sensitively, so it works for the visitor.
- Seeking the best possible benefit for the visitor within each stage.
- Addressing curatorial and operational needs.
- Considering the logistics and impact of site works.
- Assumption that all capital funding is not available at once.
- Assumption that additional revenue funding is unlikely to be available until Phase 2 (or possibly, at best, late in Phase 1).

3.2 A key element of realising the vision is the recruitment of a core, full-time team of interpretive staff who would be trained to fluency in Gaelic language and in the Gaelic cultural relevance of the collections. Establishing this full-time team would require additional revenue resources.

Assuming additional revenue funding will not be available during Phase 1 of the plan, Phase 1 chiefly lays the foundation for realising the full vision. Key steps include -

- Move collections, vernacular buildings and curatorial accommodation from Kingussie site and consolidate operations at Newtonmore.
- Development of Curatorial and Exhibition Centre.
- Visitor car park extension.
- Development of partnerships with key organisations, with practical inputs and outputs.
- Preparatory work for launching Pairc na Gàidhealtachd as a national centre for Gaelic culture.

Some actions can be taken forward in Phase 1 to enhance the profile and currency of Gaelic at the museum, within the existing revenue budget. These will include increasing the visibility of Gaelic, developing existing staff's Gaelic language skills via corporate training initiatives and encouraging the use of Gaelic at work. In recruiting the seasonal interpretive team, particular effort would be made to recruit Gaelic speakers; they too would be encouraged to use Gaelic at work. Gaelic medium tours with these staff would also be marketed to GME units and Gaelic interest groups. During Phase 1 research would also get underway into the particular Gaelic cultural relevance of items in the collection.

3.3 It is during Phase 2 that the full public face of Pairc na Gàidhealtachd, offering a unique Gaelic focused visitor and user experience, will be realised. Key to this is the recruitment of the core interpretive team who will be trained in Gaelic language and the particular cultural relevance of the collection.

Also key is the opening of a new visitor centre which, as well as café, shop, learning spaces, visitor services and offices, will house an exhibition that orientates the visitor to Gaelic explaining what is special about Gaelic culture and its relevance and distinctiveness in Scotland past, present and future.

In Phase 2 museum will provide year round public services, albeit doing slightly different things in winter and summer. In summer the focus will be on delivering visitor services at the Newtonmore site. Every visitor will experience Gaelic

language and be encouraged to try some out; Gaelic learners will be encouraged to practice, experiment and improve and Gaelic speakers will be able to learn and enjoy through the medium of Gaelic. In winter the emphasis will change to learning and outreach work, including heritage recovery and tradition bearing, in schools and communities throughout the Highlands as well as at the Newtonmore site, where there will be a programme of events, workshops and courses. During winter the team will also continue to research an exchange with partner organisation to enhance the interpretive base of the museum's story.

- 3.4 Phase 3 would focus on vernacular building development, including a village hall which could be used as an events venue and thus provide an additional income stream. The other key development would be an archaeological 'park'. Archaeological remains on site, including the Clabha Mound which is locally believed to be an ancient burial chamber, would be excavated and interpreted. A second permanent exhibition in the curatorial centre would include archaeological excavations and results, including the story of the evolution of the Gaelic language, lifestyle and culture as evidence by the archaeological works. The opportunity exists for strong links to be made with UHI's department of archaeology, enhancing the academic credibility of the museum and enabling archaeologists to work within and gain an understanding of the Gaelic context of the remains they study and interpret in the Highlands.

Public interest in archaeology has increased significantly in recent years and the museum would be well placed to run archaeology workshops, seminars etc, thus increasing customer base and income generation.

- 3.5 Plans for Phase 4 should be regarded as more indicative; it is difficult and would be ill judged to predict how market and sector trends may develop and what opportunities might arise by then.

Principally, Phase 4 would involve taking the museum story line up to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the possible creation of an Eco Park, looking at how man through time has addressed issues of sustainability and the Highlander's relationship, over the centuries, with the land.

#### **4. Costs**

- 4.1 Initial capital costings, based on present day costs with no allowance made for year on year inflation, are as follows –

Phase 1	£6,615,000
Phase 2	£6,121,500
Phase 3	£1,629,000
Phase 4	£2,750,000

The ECS capital plan has £4million allocated for the museum redevelopment. Potential sources of the remaining funding include Heritage Lottery Fund, Cairngorms National Park Authority and possibly ESF. Achieving the entire plan may, however, require direct Scottish Government support.

- 4.2 It is projected that each development phase, by increasing visitor and user numbers and therefore generating increased income, will increase the total site income as percentage of expenditure significantly. Conservative estimates indicate site income as percentage of expenditure would rise from 14.7% currently to 44% at the end of Phase 4.

- 4.3 The cost of the core, full-time interpretive team is estimated at £ 175k per annum. The additional revenue costs of phases 2, 3 and 4 will be worked out in details

after consultation on the business modelling and the mid to long term development of Pairc na Gàidhealtachd.

- 4.4 The informal stakeholder group established to guide and support the development of the museum enthusiastically endorsed the draft outline 20 year plan and expressed a willingness to be actively involved in the development of Pairc na Gàidhealtachd. This might include engagements such as Sabhal Mòr Ostaig delivering parts of their degree courses at the museum, long term loans from National Museums of Scotland collections and perhaps the National Library establishing a “branch” at the park, comprised of artefacts from their Gaelic collections.
- 4.5 Stakeholders suggest that the Council approach their governing bodies at this stage and seek their formal, in principle support for the proposed development of Pairc na Gàidhealtachd as a national centre for Gaelic culture, as outlined in the draft 20 year plan. Such agreement would mean the development of Pairc na Gàidhealtachd would be a Highland Council led initiative, supported by or perhaps on behalf of a consortium of –

University of the Highlands and Islands, including Sabhal Mòr Ostaig specifically  
Bòrd na Gàidhlig  
Cairngorms National Park Authority  
National Library of Scotland  
National Museums of Scotland  
Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
The School of Scottish Studies

## **6. Recommendation**

6.1 Members are invited to -

- a) comment on and agree the outline of the draft 20 year plan for the development of Pairc na Gàidhealtachd
- b) recommend that the Education Culture and Sport Committee consider how to implement the plan.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2009

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Ref: IM/JM

Background Papers: Report G-07-08, Gaelic Committee 13th March 2008