

The Highland Council

City of Inverness Area Committee – 23 February 2017

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CIA/ 04/17

Inverness Castle Viewpoint and Environmental Improvement Works Update

Report by the Director of Development and Infrastructure

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the progress of the current works to the North Tower and grounds of Inverness Castle. It also highlights that this is the first phase of turning the Castle into a major visitor attraction.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The present Inverness Castle sits on a site which has an interesting and eventful history. The history of the previous castles lives on in the stories of King Duncan and Macbeth to the many seizures and rebuilds during the Scottish Wars of Independence and thereafter. The present red sandstone castle was built in the 1830's by the Scottish architect William Burn, to serve as the County Hall of Inverness-shire, and house the High Court and Council offices. To this day it is still used for both Sheriff and District Courts. The North Tower, which is owned by the Highland Council, was originally built to serve as a prison.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that the £315m Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal (CRD) was signed by the Leader of the Highland Council, Cllr Margaret Davidson, Keith Brown MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Economy Jobs and Fair Work, and Lord Dunlop, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, on 30 January. The CRD includes £15m for the redevelopment of Inverness Castle into a major visitor attraction. The Castle Viewpoint is therefore the first phase of an exciting opportunity to create a significant visitor attraction for the region. The business case which will unlock the CRD funding is currently being developed.

2. Proposed Works

- 2.1 The Highland Council aims to find a new viable, and economically sustainable, alternative use for Inverness Castle following the site being vacated by the Scottish Court and Tribunals Service. It will provide access for locals and visitors, and maximise the impact on the economic, social and cultural life of Inverness and the Highlands. A working group has been established, co-chaired by Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Rural Economy

and Connectivity, and Cllr Helen Carmichael, Provost and the Leader of the City of Inverness and Area, the Highland Council.

- 2.2 The project to turn the North Tower of the Castle into a viewing platform for locals and visitors to access a 360° view of the city and surrounding area is nearing completion. The project also includes significant enhancements to the Castle grounds such as access improvements, new seating and installation of new railings. These elements are funded by an initial tranche of funding from the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal. An allocation of £2m was available to enhance the Castle grounds and this has been used to supplement the original approval of £360k.

3. Progress to Date

- 3.1 The project commenced on site 28 March 2016 and was due to complete on the 5 December 2016. Due to additional works being instructed the contract period was extended to 3 March. Works have been progressing well and the internal works are 95% complete.
- 3.2 Progress meetings are taking place every two weeks until completion. The aim is to open the Viewpoint in early April in time for Easter, and the rest of the tourist season.

4. Budget

- 4.1 The CRD fund has enabled significant upscaling of the project at no additional cost to the Council. The original budget for the project was £360k. This budget only included for minor internal alterations and an internal spiral staircase to the viewing platform. After detailed design scope change, a number of additional items were added to the project. The works and funding breakdown is as follows:

- full internal refurbishment of all floors;
- major external stonework repairs;
- complicated scaffolding design;
- window and rainwater goods repairs and repainting;
- internal fit-out for HLH;
- external environmental works; and
- external flooding lighting replacement.

- 4.2 With the above additional items the revised budget figure is £1.415m, the funding breakdown is as follows:

Project Costs

Construction Works (Building)	£ 712,221
External Environmental Works	£ 320,973
External Floodlighting	£ 134,000
High Life Highland Fit-out	£ 50,000
Professional Fees	£ 198,000

<u>Source of Funding</u>	
HIE	£ 60,000
Common Good	£ 100,000
Highland Council (D&I)	£ 200,000
City-Region Deal	£1,055,000

5. Management and Marketing

- 5.1 The Castle Viewpoint will be run by High Life Highland, through the current management agreement with The Highland Council. This has the added benefit of integrating it into the wider project for the redevelopment of Inverness Castle. The Castle Viewpoint, the marketing name for the project, will be managed through the adjacent Inverness Museum & Art Gallery. Staff will be trained to work in both facilities, ensuring cover is available at all times.
- 5.2 The Castle viewpoint is an exciting first step to turning Castle Hill into a major visitor attraction that will bring benefits both to Inverness and the rest of the Highlands. The Inverness Castle project will have a significant economic impact on the city centre of Inverness, and will also seek, as a key outcome, to encourage people to visit the rest of the Highlands. As part of the City-Region deal, the formal governance of the project is through the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee. Regular updates will also be brought to the Inverness City Committee on a six monthly basis.
- 5.3 It is expected that the Castle Viewpoint will be very popular and the intention is to open seven days a week April to October, with extended opening hours in July and August. Winter opening hours will be considered in due course. Following the first season the opening hours will be reviewed with a decision on hours based on achieving maximum profitability. Any profits from the facility will be shared between The Council and High Life Highland, and the facility will not be subsidised by the Council in the unlikely situation of making a loss.
- 5.4 However, the size and nature of the North Tower, in which the Viewpoint is situated, is such that fire regulations have led to limitations on the number of visitors allowed admission at any one time. This is limited to 59 people in the overall facility and 10 on the viewing platform itself. This is likely to create pressures at peak periods, which HLH will be ready to manage. The route up to the viewing point is laid out to provide activities and information for visitors, particularly families. Visitors with mobility issues are catered for on the ground floor, in the round room of the North Tower. Here it will be possible to view drone footage of the views with commentary on points of interest.
- 5.5 There has already been a significant amount of advance interest in the Castle Viewpoint. It was promoted at VisitScotland Expo (Scotland's main travel trade, business to business show) in April 2016, and this will be repeated in 2017.

5.6 Once the opening date is finalised the following marketing activities will be implemented:

- 'Reminder' promotional flyer emailed to each travel company that expressed specific interest in the Viewpoint at VisitScotland Expo 2016;
- mailing to all coach/travel companies who visit Inverness and who were not contacted at VisitScotland Expo;
- press launch in conjunction with HC and Scottish Government;
- launch of Castle Viewpoint website;
- Facebook campaign started;
- Twitter campaign started;
- posters/pop up banners throughout the City, including the Tourist Information Centre;
- posters distributed to all Inverness Accommodation businesses;
- prominent promotional material in Inverness Museum and Art Gallery; and
- two exclusive, reserved 'Come & See sessions at the Viewpoint for BID and TBID members.

5.7 It is proposed to provide a short period of free entry to promote the facility after the main Easter period.

6. Governance

6.1 The work to the North Tower and Castle grounds is a Council contract on a Council owned building, Inverness Common Good has provided funding support. Monthly reports are issued to the Inverness City Manager who meets with the Project Manager on a regular basis.

7. Implications

7.1 Legal

The Highland Council will continue to meet all its legal obligations under the terms of any contracts agreed.

7.2 Climate Change/Carbon Clever

All contracts will be managed in a manner which meets the Highland Council's obligations in relation to climate change.

7.2 Resource

A separate report will be issued by the Director of Finance to outline the financial implications for the Common Good Fund, forming part of the Investment Strategy and Capital Planning for the Fund.

7.3 Rural and Gaelic

The addition of this facility will enhance the City as a place to visit and have a positive impact on the visitor experience for all the City Wards which include Landward areas. The Council's policy on Gaelic signage will be adhered to.

7.4 Equality

The works have enhanced the accessibility of the Castle grounds.

7.5 Risk

There are no risk implications as a result of this report.

RECOMMENDATION

Committee is invited to note:

- progress of the current works to the North Tower and grounds of Inverness Castle; and
- that future reports on progress with the wider Castle project will be brought to committee.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

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