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| HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND  REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS  23 August 2016 | AGENDA ITEM REPORT No HLH18/16 |

## **HIGHLAND FOLK MUSEUM LONG TERM Vision - Report by Chief Executive**

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| **Summary** The purpose of this report is to present a draft Vision for Highland Folk Museum.  It is recommended Directors:-   1. consider and comment on the draft; and 2. approve the Vision document. |

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| **1.** | **Business Plan Contribution** |
| 1.1 | This report supports the highlighted Business Outcomes from the High Life Highland (HLH) Business Plan:   1. **To advance sustainable growth and financial sustainability** 2. **Deliver the Service Delivery Contract with THC** 3. Improving staff satisfaction 4. **Improving customer satisfaction** 5. **A positive company image** 6. **Services designed around customers and through market opportunities** 7. Sustain a good health and safety performance 8. **A trusted partner** |
| **2.** | **Background** |
| 2.1 | The Highland Folk Museum (HFM) at the Newtonmore site opened to the public in the early 1990s and struggled to develop as a visitor destination, attracting just a few thousand people each year. Significant investment was made in its visitor services and marketing in 1999/2000 and visitor numbers rose to 17,000 - 18,000 per year but remained stubbornly static at that level. |
| 2.2 | New strategies implemented in 2007 and the later development of the Am Fasgadh museum store and learning centre has resulted in HFM developing rapidly and successfully in recent years. Since 2007, visitor numbers have increased year on year, every year except one, peaking at a record 66,251 last year. |
| 2.3  2.4 | The creation of High Life Highland led to a more commercial approach being developed. Since 2012, income has increased in all areas; commercially generated income in 2015 was 119% more than in 2011 and profit margin was 58%*.*  This new, more commercial approach has not resulted in a reduction in the quality of the visitor experience. The reality has been the opposite and HFM’s reputation has increased: currently, TripAdvisor ranks it 1st (out of 60) Museums in the Scottish Highlands, 9th (out of 387) ‘Things To Do in the Scottish Highlands’ and places it on the list of ‘Top 10 Museums in Scotland’. 100% of visitors surveyed said they would recommend HFM to others, 72% of respondents rated their overall experience as outstanding and 28% as good (none selected ‘adequate’ or ‘poor’). |
| 2.5 | Whilst overall scoring is high, there is recurrent negative feedback about the limited space and range in the café and the very basic toilet specification. VisitScotland have also explained that the physical specification of the toilets and café is the only thing preventing HFM being awarded 5 stars in the national grading scheme. |
| **3.** | **Future Development** |
| 3.1  3.2 | In order to ensure that HFM’s full potential is achieved, its future development must be strategically planned, coherent and make maximum benefit of investment available at different points in the future. To achieve that, a long term Vision (attached as **Appendix A**) has been drafted. The Vision relates to all aspects of HFM’s business, including curatorial and interpretive, visitor destination, commercial, educational and reputational.  The Vision is broad-brush and aspirational. It is recognised, though, that each objective must be underpinned by further plans that detail specific actions, timescales, responsibility and resource allocation. |
| 3.3 | It is proposed that the Vision is delivered via a series of detailed, practical plans, each of approximately five year’s duration. The first of these will, broadly, seek to:   * Build HFM’s financial sustainability by enabling it to generate more income/ profit. This will include increasing footfall, including the development of new business streams. A first step in that would be a capital development to increase the size and scope of the visitor services (café and retail space, in particular; the current facilities can no longer cope with volume of visitors) and establish indoor artefact display galleries. This would also be an important step towards the goal of all year round opening, as both a museum ‘day out’ and as a more general leisure destination, of the Storehouse of Foulis and Brodie Countryfare ilk. This has been costed at approximately £3.5M for which funding would be sought. * Capitalise on the Am Fasgadh centre, the formal recognition of the collections as having ‘National Significance’ and their accessibility on site to build HFM’s reputation and use as a unique museum and folk life institution. This will entail developing partnerships with academic and heritage institutions, working with scholars, researchers and tradition bearers and creating opportunities to engage the wider community with the collections and their context, towards carrying cultural knowledge, understanding, tradition and skills through to future generations. |
| 3.4 | Future, five year plans are, by nature, less prescribed, as each will be informed by the opportunities that arise from implementation of the previous plan and the wider opportunities (and possible demands/constraints) that arise in the local and national context within which the museum operates. |
| 3.5 | It is currently envisaged that the next five year plan will focus on creating new business streams and ventures, including what would be made possible by accommodation being available on site. These could include outdoor pursuits and bush craft, residential courses in traditional skills and crafts and running a ‘schools’ farm’, which could become a national learning resource. |
| 3.6 | The improved and expanded visitor services facilities would also enable a year-round events programme to be developed. |
| 3.7 | Further phased plans would seek to consolidate HFM’s position as a nationally significant asset and visitor attraction and to develop its profile internationally. |
| **4.** | **Implications** |
| 4.1 | Resource Implications – there are no additional resource implications arising from this report. |
| 4.2 | Legal Implications - there are no new legal implications arising from this report. |
| 4.3 | Equality Implications – there are no new equality implications arising from this report. |
| 4.4 | Risk Implications – there are no new risk implications arising from this report. |

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| **Recommendations** It is recommended Directors:-   1. consider and comment on the draft; and 2. approve the Vision document. |

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 10 August 2016

**Appendix A**

**Highland Folk Museum**

**Long Term Vision**

1. **To be a world renowned museum recognised as holding collections of the highest significance**

We already have a nationally significant collection and the aim is to have this designated a ‘Recognised collection of national significance’. This is a scheme operated by MGS on behalf of the Scottish Government which aims to identify and protect Scotland’s most important collections. There is significant funding attached and this will allow the collection to be cared for, developed and promoted to a wider audience.

We will

* **Exploit recognition for the whole collection**
* **Be recognised as a resource with universities, national and international institutions**
* **Achieve a level of documentation commensurate with a world renowned museum**

1. **To be a must see internationally recognised visitor attraction**

Currently Edinburgh is the number one attraction for visitors to Scotland. Our aim is to be in the top ten attractions in Scotland.

We will

* **Maximise opportunities to win awards in the visitor attraction field wherever possible**
* **Achieve coverage in respected and appropriate magazines/publications**
* **Research other visitor attractions’ models and apply ‘lessons learned**
* **Develop marketing strategy**

1. **To be an internationally recognised educational facility in terms of research, education (at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, including U3A), interpretation and folk studies**

We are at the start of having the facilities to become very important in the educational field. We aim to add to our current infrastructure in terms of research facilities, accommodation and links to appropriate institutions to become a highly respected ‘go to’ centre of education.

We will

* **Develop the education product**
* **Establish partnerships with universities and other research institutions**

1. **To be open all year round**

As we develop we will aim to open all year round in some shape or form in order to satisfy our different audiences.

We will

* **Examine all possibilities for development of the site**
* **Agree ultimate aim of what HFM will look like after 20 years**
* **Write and implement a business plan to achieve aims and how forward works can be phased**

1. **To pursue a policy of collecting items only as modern as 25 years old (one generation) on a rolling basis and to continue to be a ‘folk life museum’**.

We will continue to maintain the ethos of HFM as it is entirely relevant to continue to collect every-day items and interpret the highland way of life.

We will

* **Revise the collection policy**
* **Put together outdoor plan for the whole site**
* **Agree ultimate aim of what HFM will look like after 20 years**

1. **To have developed a non-material collection i.e. culture, language, music, sport, religion etc**.

Currently our collection is predominantly tangible items – we will become a cultural hub for the collection of intangible highland culture. This would include actively promoting and developing traditional skills for future generations in the form of informal learning and courses.

We will

* **Develop in house skills for staff and volunteers**
* **Develop a programme to capture endangered skills**
* **Develop partnerships with appropriate bodies including Highland Estates**

1. **To be internationally known for saving vernacular buildings**

We will continue to pursue our policy of searching out appropriate vernacular buildings and continue to preserve traditional building techniques.

We will

* **Put together outdoor plan for the whole site**
* **Identify funding and resource opportunities**

1. **To be recognised as ‘being green’ – illustrating the history of eco stories through history and renewables**

We will begin to collect artefacts related to ‘renewables’ and tell the story of how highland lives have evolved from 100% recycling to current ways of being green Recognising that there will always be threats to public subsidy we will aim to be much less reliant by optimising current income stream and developing new ones.

We will

* **Collect artefacts related to 'renewables' (*how does this fit in with proposed collecting policy?)***
* **Develop the interpretation of historic and contemporary 'renewable energy' processes**

**June 2016**