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| HIGH LIFE HIGHLAND  REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS  18 June 2025 | AGENDA ITEM  REPORT No HLH/ /25 |

## **Inverness Castle Experience Progress Report - Report by Chief Executive**

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| **Recommendation** The purpose of this report is to provide a progress report on the Inverness Castle Experience. It is recommended Directors note the update. | |
| **1.** | **Strategy Contribution** |
| 1.1 | High Life Highland’s (HLH) purpose is Making Life Better. The HLH Strategy for 2025-2030 contains five strategic objectives which support the delivery of this purpose, and this report supports the following highlighted objectives:  1. **Delivery of affordable, accessible and inclusive services across the region.**  2. Maximise and grow income to reinvest across services.  3. Ensure a consistent high value of delivery across HLH services.  4. Commit to the net zero and sustainability agenda.  5. Efficient and effective service delivery through our people and processes. |
| **2.** | **Contract** |
| 2.1 | The Highland Council is responsible for the Inverness Castle Experience building project with governance through the Council and a delivery group which it established for the stakeholders, particularly those partners which have funded the project. |
| **3.** | **Exhibition Fit-out Contract** |
| 3.1 | The contract was accepted on the 31 October 2023. The fit-out contractor, Workhaus, is responsible for the off-site and on-site build, management and delivery of all setworks, AV programmes and media modules, interactives, artworks and sculptural elements as well as all graphics, signage and interior furnishings and finishes. |
| 3.2 | The North Tower fitout is nearing completion. The South Tower fitout is on-going; the contractors have been excellent and the workmanship is of the highest standard. |
| **4.** | **Marketing and Communications Update** |
| 4.1 | This provides an update on the following areas of work:   1. Marketing activity 2. Media activity 3. Stakeholder engagement |
| **4.2** | **Marketing Activity** |
| 4..2.1 | The following activities have been undertaken in recent weeks:   * 1. attendance at VS Connect where one to one appointments were undertaken with over 35 travel trade representatives, as well as through other ad hoc opportunities throughout the two-day event;   2. ICE also featured in familiarisation trips in Inverness before and after VS Connect featuring sustainability and luxury tour travel trade representatives;   3. liaison with VisitScotland Content Production and Multimedia Manager;   4. registration for Green Tourism and ASVA grading schemes;   5. attendance at Expedia roundtable lunch for Inverness area tourism representatives (April 2025);   6. commencing the process and scoping for an Inverness Castle Experience guidebook;   7. commencing advertising partnerships with HIAL, Scotrail, Highland News & Media and DC Thomson;   8. ongoing development of collateral for The Inverness Castle Experience including badges, lanyards, floor plans and audio guide labels; and   9. confirmation that Seanchaidh whisky had been shortlisted for the 2025 Scottish Design Awards. |
| 4.2.2 | The following events and milestones will be the focus of marketing and communications activity in the upcoming period.   1. arranging photography of the attraction prior to opening, for use across all marketing opportunities; 2. ongoing liaison with travel trade representatives to maximise group bookings; 3. finalising wayfinding signage and arranging production and installation in time for opening; 4. issuing e-news to all ICE subscribers to announce tickets on sale date and opening date; and 5. preparation and delivery of online marketing campaign. |
| **4.3** | **Media Activity** |
| 4.3.1 | The following media activity has been undertaken since March 2025:   1. project team attendance at VS Connect; 2. announcement of appointment of senior posts and subsequent recruitment drive; 3. announcement of ticketing information including resident’s benefit; 4. competition to name Flora’s pup; and 5. concessions for mobile food and ice cream. |
| 4.3.2 | The following media activity is pending:   1. launch of bespoke Inverness Castle Experience gin; 2. installation of the Peregrine Falcon nesting platform; 3. Runrig archive being developed at Highland Archive and Registration Centre; 4. restoration of the Flora MacDonald statue; and 5. countdown to tickets going on sale/opening date. |
| **4.4** | **Stakeholder Engagement** |
| 4.4.1 | P4W (partnerships for wellbeing) presentation to circa 20 members (7 April 2025). |
| 4.4.2 | Presentation to The Highland Council Gaelic Conference, May 2025. The presentation focused on the importance of Gaelic language and culture throughout the castle content. |
| 4.4.3 | Presentation to the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Working group, May 2025. |
| 4.4.4 | Work experience week, consisting of:  Monday: an overview of the castle followed by a tour of Inverness Museum and Art Gallery and a marketing workshop. The marketing workshop developed students’ filming and social media skills.  Tuesday: Students based at the Eastgate Centre to participate in a food hygiene course and a workshop on merchandising.  Wednesday and Thursday: Two on-site training days in various HLH facilities including libraries, Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, leisure centres, Highland Archive Centre and Inverness Botanic Gardens.  Friday: Training with the HR manager on CV sculpting and interview training. The students helped facilitate the Inverness Castle Experience recruitment days. |
| 4.4.5 | Members of the team were invited to present at the Museums Heritage Highland annual conference. The presentation highlighted the work that has been undertaken with the museums and the content signposting within the castle. The presentation was well received by the groups, and they are keen to continue to work with the team on future projects and programming. |
| 4.4.6 | Inverness Castle project team attended the Nairn Careers Fair in May. The Fair was run by The Highland Council’s Employability Team. The main purpose was to promote the forthcoming recruitment days, opportunities within the castle and to network with employment agencies. |
| 4.4.7 | The team presented to Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to showcase the project and highlight the content within the castle which is signposting to each of the HIE areas. The presentation was well attended and well received. |
| 4.4.8 | The ‘Naming of Flora’s pup’ competition was launched. 120 Highland primary schools were asked to name the pup and write a story or poem about the dog. Over 170 suggestions were received which have been rag rated by the team and will now be judged by a panel of castle representatives. |
| 4.4.9 | Members of the project team attended the Scottish Tourism Signature Conference in Edinburgh in March. The conference brought together leading voices and industry experts and was a useful event to give the latest insights to the tourism trends. |
| 4.4.10 | The project team conducted site visits with the Boards of both High Life Highland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise taking them through the progress on site and planned content details. |
| 4.4.11 | Members of the project team were delighted to be invited by Savills to present the Inverness Castle Experience at their Business Breakfast for the Tourism, Leisure and Events sector. The presentation was well received by those in attendance and the event provided the team with new networking opportunities in the city centre. |
| 4.4.12 | The Spirit of the Highlands and Islands project produced 57 tapestry panels from across Highland communities. 30 of these will be on display within the Inverness Castle Experience, with the remaining 27 available for display across their creating communities. All tapestry panels have now found a home for the summer season across the regions. |
| **5.** | **Operations** |
| 5.1 | This provides an update on the following areas of operational activity.   1. recruitment 2. training 3. pricing 4. ticketing 5. EPOS Systems 6. audio guides 7. communications 8. staff scheduling 9. security 10. retail 11. concessions |
| **5.2** | **Recruitment** |
| 5.2.1 | The following posts have now been filled, and other than the Assistant Manager – Visitor Services positions, all have commenced employment.   1. Food & Beverage Manager 2. Visitor Service Manager 3. Retail Manager 4. Head Chef 5. Administration & Bookings Officer 6. Clerical Assistant (2 positions) 7. Assistant Manager – Visitor Services (3 positions) |
| 5.2.2 | Interviews are in place for the following posts.   1. Assistant Manager – Food & Beverage (2 positions) 2. Assistant Manager – Retail 3. Sous Chef 4. Chef De Partie |
| 5.2.3 | The following roles have been advertised prior to Recruitment Open Days which were held on 29, 30 and 31 May.   1. Estates Officer 2. Cleaning Supervisor 3. ICT Visitor Experience Technician 4. Commis Chef 5. Catering Assistants 6. Visitor Services Assistants 7. Retail Assistants 8. Store Person 9. Kitchen Assistants 10. Kitchen Porters 11. Cleaners 12. Caretakers 13. Sales and Marketing (autumn start date) |
| **5.3** | **Training** |
| 5.3.1 | Training is being discussed with the new managers and shaped, ready for the intake of larger numbers of staff. IHASCO will be our online provider for mandatory health and safety training including food hygiene. We are in discussion with the Director of Sport, Leisure and Safeguarding around safeguarding training for the whole team in July and exploring the most appropriate anti-terrorism training for assistant level staff. There will be significant additional training from the managers to their teams prior to opening, in the work environment, to enable the delivery of the standard required. There will be cross-training between teams to ensure service delivery standards. |
| **5.4** | **Budget and Pricing** |
| 5.4.1 | The HLH Board considered the castle budget at its March 20205 meeting when it set is budget. The budget will be reviewed as the project progresses, and the opening date is confirmed. Prices have been published on [The Inverness Castle Experience website](https://invernesscastle.scot/news/2025/03/24/highland-residents-to-benefit-from-pricing-proposals-for-the-inverness-castle-experience). |
| **5.5** | **Ticketing** |
| 5.5.1 | The ticketing system continues to be developed and remains on target. The mechanisms for group purchases and disabled parking have been finalised. The Highlander Pass is being developed, and opportunities for Gift Cards are being explored. |
| 5.5.2 | iPads have been ordered to support ticket scanning and walk-up sales. |
| **5.6** | **EPOS Systems** |
| 5.6.1 | The full order for the equipment and software has been placed. An implementation and training schedule has been drafted commensurate with the arrival of new staff. Inventory will be worked on first, followed by retail activities. |
| **5.7** | **Audio Guides** |
| 5.7.1 | The Guide-ID equipment has been received. Staff now have access to the Content Management System that delivers the audio content to the guides and monitors its use. |
| **5.8** | **Communications** |
| 5.8.1 | Internet connectivity throughout the castle is now complete. Wi-Fi is expected to go live by mid-July 2025. |
| 5.8.2 | Mobile radios have been purchased to allow staff to communicate without reliance on WiFi or internet connectivity. This is particularly useful for remote areas of the castle and grounds, and for events management. |
| 5.8.3 | Plans are in place to introduce internet-based telephony via smartphones or dedicated handsets. As part of this, a public telephone number will be set up to receive enquiries about ticketing, group purchases, events etc., with these directed to appropriate staff. |
| **5.9** | **Staff Scheduling** |
| 5.9.1 | Rota and scheduling software is being evaluated. This will allow line managers to schedule staff quickly and easily and create the necessary timesheet and finance information. |
| **5.10** | **Security** |
| 5.10.1 | Consultation with local businesses, police and BID indicates a need for a robust security plan for the Inverness Castle Experience (ICE) to ensure the safety of our visitors, staff and assets, due to the level of vandalism and anti-social behaviour in the Inverness city centre area. The Head of ICE has drawn up a proposed scope of service for guarding the property during main operating hours (10am till 10pm) and for evening patrols along with call outs for both intruder and fire alarm activations.  A tender to provide these services is being prepared. Additional CCTV provision has also been commissioned. It is also proposed that new fencing and control gates will be instructed once the Bancon contract is complete. This is subject to approval of The Highland Council planning service and Historic Environment Scotland and subject to new funding being approved to carry out these works. |
| **5.11** | **Retail** |
| 5.11.1 | Ordering has started on the long lead items for the Castle retail range, of which there are 200 lines. The search continues for additional retail storage space. |
| **5.12** | **Concessions** |
| 5.12.1 | Invites for notes of interest have gone out for a food and beverage concession and an ice cream concession. The concessions will be located outside of the Saltire Bistro and will assist with servicing those that either cannot find space in the Bistro or are looking for a quick takeaway option. |
| **6.** | **Delivery Group Meetings** |
| 6.1 | There are two more Delivery Group verbal update meetings (July and August) and one final Delivery Group in person meeting (September). |
| **7.** | **Implications** |
| 7.1 | Resource Implications – the budget was considered by the HLH Board and will be reviewed as the opening date is firmed up and decisions taken by the Highland Council referred to in the Inverness Castle Experience governance report elsewhere on this agenda. |
| 7.2 | Legal Implications – there is a separate report on governance arrangements, which includes a legal check on arrangements, elsewhere on this agenda. |
| 7.3 | Equality Implications – Public services must complete integrated impact assessments and this will be completed prior to opening (see governance report elsewhere on this agenda). |
| 7.4 | Risk Implications – the Inverness Castle Experience has been included in the HLH risk register. |

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| **Recommendations** It is recommended Directors note the update. |

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 9 June 2025

Author: Fiona Hampton, Director of Inverness Castle Project