



Summary

The multi-partner strategy focused on sustainable visitor management and enhanced visitor experience will be developed. This hinge around the concept of a visitor hub as the “Gateway into the Glen”. Core messages from all partner organisations and coherent design will greatly improve visitor learning, enjoyment & access.



This project will develop a 21st century visitor experience befitting a national icon. It will increase understanding of the areas outstanding natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, a strategic multi-partner plan will insure that any future interpretation information and information is coordinated, landscape scale and unified.

The project will incorporate a full range of heritage including Gaelic, mountain ecosystems, biodiversity, geodiversity, sites of cultural interest and local history. Visitors will be engaged through a variety of multimedia and interpretation formats.

The project will also protect landscape character through education around the issues of human impacts and ecological sensitivity. It is fundamentally at the heart of a partnership approach to sustainable visitor management and education which is future focused and strategically planned in a world class destination.

AIMS

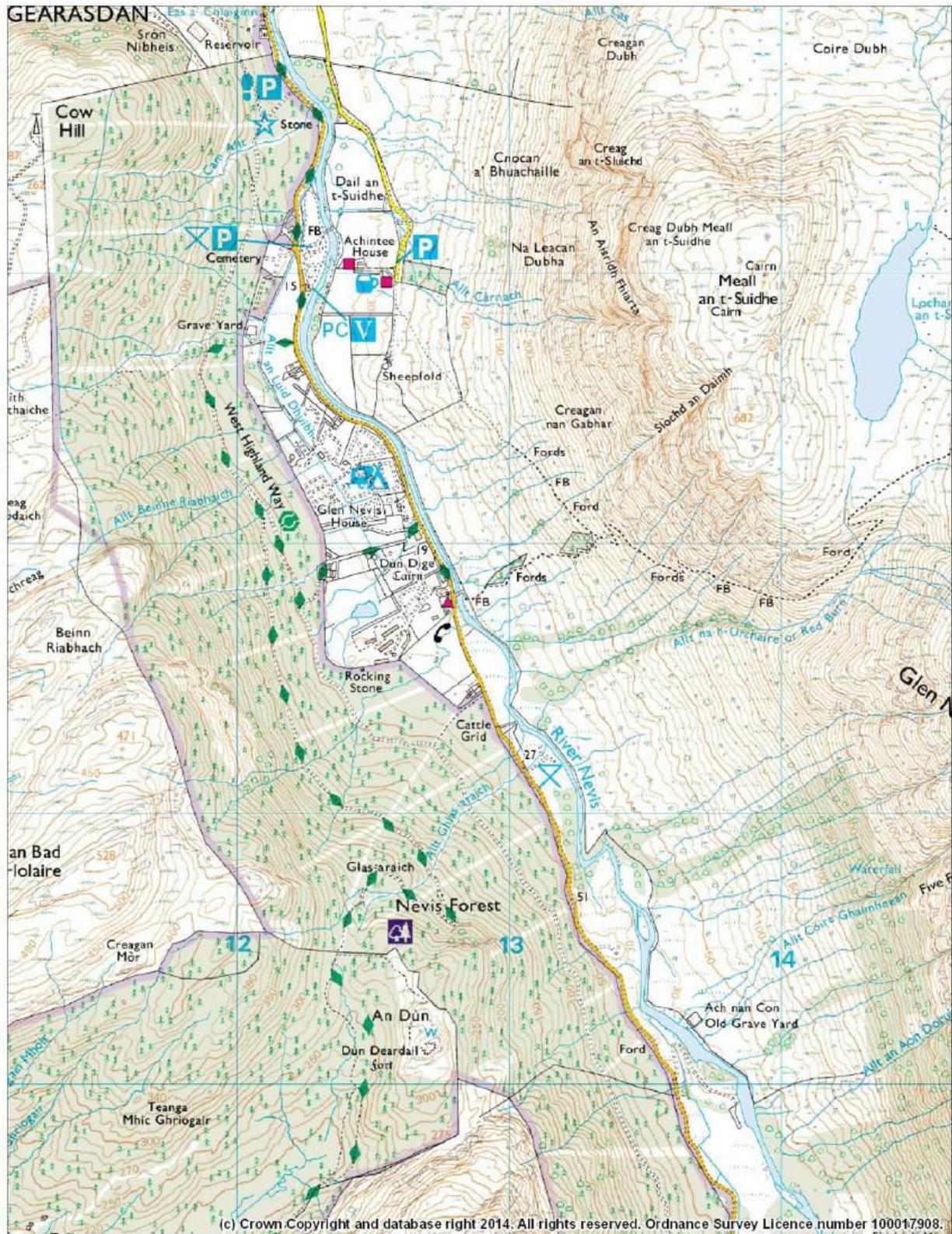
The purpose of the Sustainable Futures Interpretation, Installation and Information Project will be to unite key stakeholders in their approach to connecting people with the cultural and natural heritage of Scotland’s most famous mountain and its surrounding landscape. A collaborative approach will ensure a legacy far beyond the initial investment and deliver a twenty-first century visitor experience, befitting a national iconic area.

Overarching Themes:

- Visitor experience and learning
- Natural and cultural heritage
- National importance of Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis
- Value & fragility of ecosystems
- Climate change and the future of Ben Nevis

PROJECT LOCATION

Glen Nevis



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Following an extensive period of consultation and research (see appendices: NLP Community Consultation, 2013; Training, Learning & Participation Strategy, 2013), it has become clear that while Ben and Glen Nevis are landscapes greatly valued for their scenery, iconic status and opportunities for recreation, there remain significant challenges and opportunities.

Key finding from the NLP Community Consultation, 2013 (see appendices):

“The visitor centre is the key to unlocking and managing the potential of the glen, managing impact, increasing engagement and ramping up the quality of the visitor experience as the ‘gateway to the Glen’ and the springboard for other activities. Shelter, learning spaces (inside and out) and training are required, along with appropriate mapping and interpretation. The visitor centre can be ‘that central place’ (a hub) where lots of different organisations can promote activities.”

Key Findings from the Training, Learning & Participation Strategy, 2013 (see appendices):

The landscape is overburdened with pockets of visitor pressure and is currently underresourced to sufficiently manage or mitigate these impacts. The lack of national park status has served to disadvantage the resourcing to deal with these issues, The principles of ecotourism and ecophilosophy suggest that people are most likely to consider climate change implications, protect and conserve the wild and natural environments they encounter if they have a sense of belonging, understanding and ownership of these places. Findings from the community consultation process, which was used to inform the development of this document, include:

- ***A desire to improve learning about and understanding of a wide range of topics, from ecosystems to heritage;***
- ***Requirements for better and more facilities within the Glen, such as improved interpretation materials and a better ‘learning space’; and***
- ***Issues in terms of engaging with key audiences and influencing behaviour for example.***

As a ‘brand’ Ben Nevis holds international value and provides the bedrock of a vibrant tourism economy in the Lochaber region. The NLP aims to capitalise on the charismatic pull of Ben Nevis, while meeting the key objectives of a diversity of organisations, agencies and communities with a stake in the area. The project will deliver visitor information and a range of educational activities that will engage tens of thousands of people with Scotland's natural heritage. Through this partnership process, it will build the social capital necessary to sustain management of the land long after initial investment.

The Partners recognise that Ben and Glen Nevis represent priceless assets for Scotland. They include infrastructure and geography that underpin the local economy, while providing powerful cultural and symbolic meaning for millions of people. They also support a globally unique diversity of flora and fauna and provide the wild habitats upon which they - and the local human community - depend.

The Partnership aims to implement a project of international significance which represents a unique and rich opportunity to sustain the future of the area. It will provide a landmark example of international best-practice, appropriate for one of the world's best known and best loved mountains

The Sustainable Futures Interpretation, Installation & Information project will leverage this appeal to a national audience and will focus on Scotland's future - its people, its landscapes and biodiversity. It will adopt an innovative approach to environmental education, interlinking multi-media platforms and experiences of wild places, as the inspiration for learning about nature, ecosystem services and threats such as climate change. The programme will engage a generation in Scotland's natural heritage.

The project acknowledges the national cultural and environmental significance of Ben and Glen Nevis and also the fragility of this wild landscape. An integrated multi-media project, combining a range of both digital and traditional platforms in one of Scotland's most iconic destinations will significantly improve the visitor experience and help reduce negative environmental impacts.

The project has been developed in response to a significant lack of modern, high quality visitor information. Similarly, there is an unavoidable and increasing need to find creative ways to educate and inspire people to make less impact on a popular and fragile mountain environment.

Many day visitors and in particular many of the numerous charity event participants may have never set foot in mountain terrain or wild landscapes before. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge being to quickly inform and engage the public regards low impact ethics and the value and fragility of the landscape as well as ensuring public safety. The opportunity is to capitalise on the high profile and international status of Ben Nevis to increase public awareness with both local and global issues so that we might influence behaviour positively. The fact that for many this will be their first ever experience of a mountain, and as such a significant life event, presents an opportunity to influence future attitudes.

Climate change will have a major influence on this environment over the coming decades. As the UK's highest mountain and highest habitat, Ben Nevis will be an early indicator of ecological impacts in the British Isles. Given its already high profile, it has real potential to act as a landmark project for raising awareness of the implications of climate change.

A significant part of the Sustainable Futures Interpretation, Installation & Information project will be a remodelling and reconceptualising of the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre. The centre, owned and operated by the Highland Council currently interprets some aspects of the cultural and natural heritage of the area but content is biased towards those elements that were felt relevant to the Council's aims in the early 2000s. This project would create a high quality engaging and educational experience for visitors to the glen by matching visitor demand for enjoyment and learning with coordinated messages and content from all partners – all seamlessly presented from the visitor's perspective.

OBJECTIVES

Scheme Objectives		
Protect and enhance landscape character for future social and environmental benefit	1	✓
Encourage responsible access and mitigate visitor impacts	2	✓✓
Strengthen ecosystem resilience and plan for future adaptation	3	
Connect people with the landscape through meaningful and memorable experiences	4	✓✓
Increase learning and appreciation of cultural heritage	5	✓✓
Support community participation in conservation and visitor management	6	✓✓
Increase knowledge, skills and employability in conservation and eco-tourism	7	
Increase public awareness of the importance of biodiversity, ecosystem services and environmental pressures	8	✓✓
Adopt a partnership approach to visitor/land management, which is future focused, adaptive and landscape-scale	9	✓✓
Develop the local economy in a sustainable way	10	✓✓
Contribute to health and wellbeing by encouraging and improving access to the outdoors	11	✓✓
Provide an example of best-practice in sustainable nature-based tourism	12	✓✓

Specific Objectives:

- To provide a 21st century visitor experience, befitting a national iconic area
- To improve access to a wide range of landscape and heritage information from all partners, presented in a single location
- To reduce visitor/event impacts through education
- To develop a strategy for sustainable, partnership-based visitor management
- To provide a hub for visitor engagement with the landscape
- To provide a hub for community participation and volunteer activity in the area

DELIVERABLE OUTPUTS

1) Project: Visitor Interpretation strategy

The first phase of the project is the development of a landscape-scale interpretation strategy. Initial work will see external consultancy services used to gather detailed information from partners on the key messages that require to be communicated to visitors. This stage involves mainly stakeholder meetings facilitated by the external consultant that lead to an agreed set of themes and messages that require interpretation.

The second stage of developing the Visitor Interpretation strategy will see external consultants consider best practice from other visitor centres with similar aims e.g. the Scottish Seabird Centre and make recommendations on how the agreed themes and messages can best be presented in an engaging way to visitors. In recognition of the partners wish to see much of this delivered through a single location / visitor hub a specific element of this work will be to recommend how the existing visitor centre can best be remodelled to achieve this aim.

Budget: £5,000 for first stage. Second stage costs are incorporated as part of the costs of creating a visitor hub described below.

2) Project: Creation of a visitor hub

While it is recognised that some information or interpretation may be appropriate at individual sites own or managed by partners there is also recognition from partners that the creation of a single hub would be hugely beneficial. The existing visitor centre is the obvious location for this as it is already the main parking area in the glen, the main access point for Ben Nevis and the location of other facilities such as a picnic area and the only public toilets in the glen and as such the site already attracts a large proportion of the visitors coming to the glen.

The exact detail of how best to deliver this element will be defined by the Visitor Interpretation Strategy but it is envisaged that the approach will be replacement of the current interpretation using a mix of traditional and digital technologies to engage visitors. Incorporation of more interactive elements particularly those aimed at children and younger visitors would be included as a way to increase the level of engagement and make learning fun.

The exact information to be included will again be defined by the Visitor Interpretation Strategy but previous consultation and feedback from partners suggests the main areas are likely to be:

- Mountain ecosystems
- Climate change Wildlife and habitat
- Archaeology and history of the Glen
- Geodiversity
- Land use history & the crofting culture
- Cultural heritage including the significance of the Gaelic language to and in the area.
- Ben Nevis – its place in mountaineering and meteorological history
- Walking and biking routes. Sites of interest.
- Key messages –wild camping, safety, litter, toilets, responsible access, leave no trace.
- Public transport information.

Provision of mapping including an interactive map of the area that assists visitors in orientating themselves on arrival will be a key element.

The budget provided for this project includes an element for the production of interpretive content in a digital format that could be used both in interactive displays in the visitor centre but which would also form the basis for an outreach element where interpretation and information would be offered through other mediums such as online and through apps for phones and tablets.

Budget: £40,000 (Cost includes an element to cover external project management as in house capacity is limited)

3) Project: Addition of an Outdoor Community and Learning Space

This element would see the building of an essential structure providing shelter from the weather, located near to the Visitor Centre. All of the Partnership's community engagement projects and the Nevis Training Programme require an outdoor shelter to act as a hub for conservation activities. There is currently no suitable structure in the Glen and nowhere for conservation volunteers to meet. Similarly all of the wider public engagement activities and biodiversity activities require a sheltered meeting place. The success of many elements of the entire scheme rests upon this shelter.

It is envisaged that a simple, yet well designed ecological wooden structure could be developed in partnership with the Forestry Commission and materials could be provided as in-kind contribution.

Budget: £15,000 (It is expected that a high value for money structure can be developed through contributions from FCS in terms of timber.)

4) Project: Gaelic Trail - Interpretation of Gaelic language outside the Visitor Centre

A further element of interpretation of Gaelic language and culture lends itself particularly well to interpretation outside the Visitor Centre. Since the Gaelic alphabet is based on tree names and a Gaelic trail utilising many of the trees within the grounds and aimed particularly at children and young people is proposed. This would also be linked to the Outdoor Access and Learning Space and could form a key part of educational events held there.

Budget: £5,000

5) Project: Interpretation Gallery

A series of creatively designed, panels acting as an outdoor gallery which could be utilised for a range of purposes:

- Event promotion and audience engagement
- Delivering key messages/information
- Showcasing photography and artistic competitions, displaying the area's iconic landscape character and wildlife
- Display – local community and schools projects
- Display – charity event info and volunteer activities
- Interpretation and information: wild landscapes, ecology, geology, ecosystems, and cultural heritage
- Artistic outputs from resident Outlandia artists, already working with NLP producing provocative works of art focusing on climate change, biodiversity, conservation and landscape

Investigation will be made into the feasibility of the gallery being to some extent mobile. This would allow some of the installations to potentially be moved to other key sites within the Landscape Area. Similarly, at key times they might be able to move throughout Fort William supporting other projects such as 'Celebrating the Wild'. This would increase audience engagement and learning about the landscape. In turn, this would bring the landscape of Ben and Glen Nevis into the heart of the local community and better inform visiting tourists of the area's natural and cultural heritage.

Artistic projects and outputs from Outlandia will be given a platform to share them with a much wider audience. This will add to both local and visitors appreciation and understanding of the environment, connecting art and landscape to promote the area and deliver important environmental messages to educate and reduce visitor impacts.

Budget: £10,000

OUTPUT INDICATORS & TARGETS

Landscape-scale interpretation strategy

Redesigned visitor centre that promotes messages from all partners and promotes

Covered outdoor community and learning space

Gaelic Trail in Visitor Centre Grounds

Interpretation Gallery

OUTCOMES

- A gold standard visitor experience, incorporating multi-media approaches to recreation, landscape and cultural interpretation and access to information
- A wider appreciation of the impacts of climate change and human pressures on the landscape
- Safer, more responsible and informed visitors
- Increased appreciation of the importance of Cultural Heritage, especially the Gaelic language and its relationship with the Landscape
- A wider appreciation and understanding of the environmental importance of Ben Nevis as one of the UK's most extreme and fragile habitats
- To improve partnership working – pooling the shared knowledge and presenting coherent and coordinated messages from all stakeholders and visitors

ACTIVITIES AND TIMETABLE

Initial work would concentrate on the development of the Visitor Interpretation strategy and all other work would follow on from this. An expected timetable for this would be:-

Activity	Timing
Research and stakeholder consultation to agree themes and Messages	Winter 2014 - 2015
Interpretive strategy and design proposals for visitor centre	Early 2015
Visitor centre redevelopment (avoiding summer season)	Winter 2015-16
Gaelic trail	Winter 2015-16
Outdoor Interpretation and education space	Winter 2015-16
Interpretation Gallery and development of digital media for external use	Winter 2017

EVIDENCE, REVIEW AND REPORTING

Although a number of partners will be involved in coordinating elements of the project, ongoing monitoring will be carried out by the Highland Council and recording of such indicators will continue. Systems are already in place to record information such as:

- Number of visitors to the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre including daily, weekly and seasonal patterns
- Car parking numbers
- Numbers of charity events and participant numbers
- Usage levels on the bridge at the Visitor Centre and on selected other paths
- Numbers attending events such as Countryside Ranger events

Some of this information is already incorporated in the Council's own performance indicators and used for reporting to Council committees.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Whilst the projects carry out no direct conservation work, they will significantly contribute to the sustainable future of landscape heritage. This is based on the basic premise of human ecology, that society is intrinsically interconnected and dependent upon the natural world. Furthermore it is predicated on the principle that we will only protect that which we value.

Through meaningful engagement and interaction with our environment we create the opportunity to become more connected with it and hence to come to care for it. There is no question that the legacy of our natural heritage lies in the hands of the next generation. It is therefore vital that we provide a rich and diverse range of opportunities for visitors and families to enjoy this special area, to learn about the value of its biodiversity and ecosystem services and to discover its cultural history and prehistoric origins.

BENEFICIARIES AND COMMUNICATION

Through a Partnership approach to managing visitors this project will unlock social and financial resources that would not otherwise be available to the community. A legacy of social cohesion, economic stability and environmental resilience will emerge and sustain itself long into the future.

The project's economic value will be realised through improved visitor experience. By providing infrastructure and information visitors will be invited to spend more time, in ways accessible to their ability and aspirations, in and around the mountain and glen. This in turn is expected to increase visitors length of stay in the area and encourage more repeat visits.

A collective response to visitor experience is the only way large-scale challenges like impacts, climate change, sustainability and community resilience can be met effectively in the long-term. This project creates the working relationships necessary to deliver outcomes far beyond the scope of any individual organisation or agency.

Ben Nevis itself draws over 100,000 visitors a year. Most of them are not mountaineers or climbers, but everyday people fascinated by this high place. When they meet the mountain - which is always done on the mountain's terms - they are given experiences that exceed anything they have previously known. These have tremendous impact, opening people to a new sense of self - and their place in wider nature. These kinds of wild experiences have led to some of the most powerful social movements in history, including the birth of the conservation movement itself. They also form the basis of every major spiritual tradition on Earth.

In short, experiences of wild places are one of the most significant factors of social form and change. Ben Nevis, with its magnetic pull and easy access - through education and engagement - offers an unrivalled opportunity to develop Scotland's social and cultural heritage.

WIDER CONTEXT

This project sits alongside a number of the other Nevis Landscape Partnership projects which complement each other. A number of other projects in the scheme will bring improvements to the area but for the benefit of these to be maximised there is a need to communicate information with both local residents and visitors to the glen.

The project will also form the basis of a longer-term partnership approach to providing information and advice to visitors in a collaborative way rather than each partner solely providing information or advice related to their specific role or area of interest.

PROJECT BUY-IN

The project has been proposed and developed by the Highland Council as part of a multi partner approach to providing coordinated information and interpretation to visitors. The main partners with a need to communicate their messages to visitors who will be involved in this project are:

- The Highland Council
- Forestry Commission Scotland
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- John Muir Trust
- Lochaber Geopark

The fact that the Visitor Centre and adjacent grounds are owned and managed by The Highland Council brings additional security to the investment of public funds.

PROJECT LEAD

Planning & Development Service
The Highland Council
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX

The Highland Council already manage the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre. Through the Council's projects team the Council manage / contract a number of capital projects including many with a signage and/ or interpretation element and have considerable experience in this area as well as extensive knowledge of existing visitor behaviour and requirements through the existing engagement that takes place with the visitor centre staff.

PARTNERS/ CONTRACTORS ETC.

The main partners involved in this project are:

The Highland Council

- Forestry Commission Scotland
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- John Muir Trust
- Lochaber Geopark

No contractors have yet been appointed but all contracts to be let by the Council will require to be advertised under the Council's procurement regulations. This involves competitive quotations being sought for all work with an expected value of over £5000 and it is normal practice to take this approach even for lower value contracts. Some work may be undertaken by contractors who have already been appointed by the Council on term contracts for specific types of work.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The Nevis Landscape Partnership identified at a fairly early stage that there was a real need for some degree of coordination of messages being directed to local people and, perhaps more importantly, to visitors to the glen. The most obvious way of doing this was to make use of the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre which already attracts a large proportion of visitors to the glen. The project then devolved to become a redevelopment of the visitor centre which could be led by the Highland Council as owner and operator of the property but which will involve a range of partners collaborating on the delivery of messages jointly.

Budgets	£
Interpretive plan	5,000
Creation of a Visitor hub	40,000
Outdoor Access and Learning Space	15,000
Gaelic trail	5,000
Mobile Interpretation	10,000
TOTAL	75,000

Income	£
The Highland Council	30,000
The Highland Council Gaelic Development	5,000
HLF	47%

PERMISSIONS AND COMPLIANCE

The Visitor Centre and adjacent grounds are owned by The Highland Council who would manage the project so no further landowner permission would be required. Planning permission and building warrants would however be required for structures such as the outdoor access and learning space.

LEGACY AND MAINTENANCE

The legacy from this project is significant in that a redesigned and refitted visitor centre is likely to have an expected lifespan of 10 – 15 years before any significant refit would be required.

Day to day maintenance and repairs to all interpretation in the Visitor Centre would be the responsibility of the Council as operators and Council maintenance staff would also undertake similar maintenance of interpretation of installations in the grounds.

RISKS AND RISK MITIGATION

Failure to obtain relevant permissions. Risk can be minimised by ensuring good design, in keeping with the area and development guidance. All contracted works will comply with The Highland Council procurement policies, and HSE regulations/guidelines.

