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MASTERPLAN FOR FYVIE'S SIXTH AGE: A NEW CHAPTER IN THE CASTLE'S 800-YEAR STORY

Scotland's largest conservation charity, the National Trust for Scotland has today announced a multi-million-pound masterplan to transform one of the country's most significant historic sites.

Fyvie Castle, Garden and Estate, near Turriff in Aberdeenshire has its origins as a royal stronghold under King William 'the Lion' in the early 13th century. Famously, its ownership has passed through some of the most powerful families in Scotland over the 'five ages of Fyvie' – the Prestons, the Meldrums, the Setons, the Gordons and the Forbes-Leiths – before being acquired by the Trust for the nation in 1984 and being opened to the public to resounding success in 1986.

Now Fyvie is about to embark on its 'sixth age' as the Trust launches a masterplan that will be delivered in phases, beginning initially with essential conservation work to this historic A-listed castle and saving the B-listed, at-risk Old Home Farm complex in the estate grounds, making it ready to be transformed into a welcoming visitor hub.

This exciting work will allow public access to parts of the building, including the Victorian stables, for the first time. This first phase will also include work to the estate to improve footpaths, extend access and provide natural heritage engagement opportunities, whilst seeking to begin reducing carbon emissions and support positive climate action.

Initial conservation works at the 800-year-old castle will address critical issues such as decay to carved stonework, including the iconic 16th century finials (figures playing sports and musical instruments which stand boldly atop the turrets on the castle's roofline).

The ambitious masterplan, which was developed with support from a design team led by conservation and regeneration specialists Page\Park architects, is expected to take at least a decade to implement in full, with the first phase completed by 2027 at a cost of circa £5 million.

The planned level of investment will necessitate major international fundraising, working with local communities, individuals and organisations with passion for Fyvie and its stories and for innovative conservation practices.

The new Visitor Hub will house a new café, exhibition, conference, retail, skills and workshop spaces, with the restoration showcasing the importance of the Old Home Farm buildings as the beating heart of the historic estate.

Once the first phase is complete, attention will then move to the next phases of the project, including further fundraising and works related to:

- Protecting and showcasing the “treasures of Fyvie”, the internationally significant collection of art, antiquities, objects and furniture, including the outstanding collection of works by Henry Raeburn and the famously stylish portrait of General William Gordon by Batoni along with a rare Tiffany glass lamp, suits of armour and the death mask of a murderer. This includes re-display of sculptures which have not been seen by the public in decades due to conservation requirements and reintroducing the lost tradition of art and sculpture in the landscape.
- A major programme of conservation repairs to the castle to stabilise structural issues to the castle’s main façade along with work to upgrade essential building services and to protect the fragile interiors with their ornate and elaborate panelling and plasterwork. The visitor experience at the castle will also be brought to life with new storytelling and interpretation, in honour of the property’s long history of warmth and hospitality.
- Significant work around nature conservation, protecting and enhancing the estate, providing wider access through an improved and extended footpath network with areas created for play, learning and discovery.
- Improving the property’s environmental sustainability, through adoption of renewable technology, along with improvements to reduce consumption and emissions through designed and nature-based solutions in response to the Trust’s commitment to help address climate change through carbon reduction.
- Delivering a programme of skills training, learning and engagement as part of the project delivery and reconnecting the estate to the local and regional communities as well as creating connections with national and international visitors alike.

Phil Long OBE, the Chief Executive of the National Trust for Scotland said:

“Fyvie Castle is celebrated in legend and song and represents the story of Scotland written in stone.

“It has been at the centre of Scottish powerplay for much of its eight centuries, hosting formidable dynasties, siege and intrigue, serving for a time as a royal nursery, as well as being caught up in the civil strife of the troubled 17th century when a battle was fought in its grounds and it was later occupied by Cromwellian troops.

“Each of the five owning families evolved the castle’s architecture, changing its appearance and purposes. Beginning as a royal stronghold, it eventually became the home and playground of the locally born Alexander Forbes-Leith who, with his American wife Marie-Louise, and the fortune they acquired through their business in the USA, restored and expanded the building and filled it with treasures which now make it home to one of the great art collections of Scotland.

"Now, through this masterplan, the National Trust for Scotland is taking the castle, gardens and grounds into their next era, conserving them for future generations and making them more accessible and engaging to all, under our care for the benefit of the nation.

"This is one of the major projects the Trust is committing to as we approach our centenary in 2031 – Fyvie, as one of pre-eminent places in Scotland's heritage, to which people come to from around the world. It is inspiring to think about the connections between this place and one of our other key projects – Mackintosh Illuminated - as it has been said that Charles Rennie Mackintosh was influenced by the external castellated appearance of Fyvie Castle when creating his own ground-breaking architecture."

Iain Hawkins, the National Trust for Scotland's Regional Director for the North East said:

"Situated in beautiful countryside on the road between Aberdeen, Elgin and Inverness, Fyvie Castle's militarily strategic location positions it well to attract visitors locally from Aberdeenshire and from further afield.

"It's now time to realise the full potential of this historic gem and engage more people in its fascinating story, as well as the abundance of nature and beauty to be found in its 123 acres of designed landscape, including a walled garden, extensive lawns, ornamental drives, acres of forests and an 18th-century constructed lake. We'll be creating new trails around the estate, which along with the castle and gardens, will be accessed from a new visitor hub at the Old Home Farm.

"Once complete, the Old Home Farm will arise from its current semi-ruinous condition to become a centre for visitor orientation, education, gallery spaces and high-quality retail and catering offers.

"In due course, the globally important collections in the castle will also receive considerable attention, including the renowned 1766 portrait painted by Pompeo Batoni of Colonel the Hon. William Gordon of Fyvie. Fresh interpretation and curation designed for all ages will bring a range of fascinating artefacts and artworks to life and we hope that they can be complemented by specially commissioned contemporary art responding to the site's centuries of history.

"As well as committing our own resources to this vitally important project, we'll be looking to the generosity of our supporters as we progress towards realising the full extent of this ambitious masterplan. We hope that the history and setting of the castle, together with the full potential embedded in our ambitious plan, will prove inspiring to all who love Aberdeenshire and Scotland, and that they will join our fundraising and donate to be part of Fyvie's future."

Annie Robertson, the National Trust for Scotland's Project Director for Fyvie added:

"The masterplan for Fyvie Castle, Garden and Estate sets out a grand vision that touches upon every aspect of this place.

"There is a tremendous need for essential conservation as well as visionary improvement work to be undertaken over the next decade, ranging from saving Old Home Farm, protecting the castle with its important collection and providing learning, play and discovery to visitors, young and old. We are also entrenching sustainable practices and systems into the project that will contribute to the Trust's Net Zero ambitions and protect it for our future generations.

"One of the most important aspects for me is the degree of engagement we have already enjoyed with the local community, especially local groups including schools, universities and learning organisations, as we developed the plan. It's our aim to ensure that the reimagined Fyvie Castle will provide considerable benefit to the regional economy and local community and that we have the opportunity to offer skills training and employment as we move ahead."

John Brown, Director at Page\Park said: "Page\Park is delighted to have been selected by the National Trust for Scotland to design the strategic masterplan for Fyvie Estate and develop the conservation proposals for Fyvie Castle.

"At the heart of the masterplan is an exploration of the joyful spirit of Fyvie, a place that has been known for extravagant entertaining and architectural folly across several centuries. Building on this theme, we have developed a strategy that will meet the needs of the modern visitor, while revealing more that Fyvie has to offer.

"As a practice, we are fully committed to the conservation and adaptive re-use of existing buildings. The proposals to adapt Old Home Farm are part of this vital work to save our nation's heritage. Working collaboratively with The National Trust for Scotland, we hope to expand participation and engagement with heritage, showcasing how our historic environment can be integrated with a net-zero future."

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About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.