

Haddo Country Park Forum Ltd Business Plan

2019 – 2024

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1. Executive Summary

This business plan has been created to support the requirement and sustainability of a visitor services officer at Haddo Country Park.

In this document and appendices The Haddo Country Park Forum Ltd (Forum Ltd.) will outline the intention to lease the car park at Haddo Country Park for a period of 30 years, and demonstrate consideration of potential benefits and pitfalls. Additionally, the Forum Ltd. will be responsible for the provision of a varied and interesting events schedule, the income from which will be used to provide further events and activities as well as improvement projects in the park and increased volunteer opportunities.

The Forum Ltd. and wider Haddo Forum Group will continue to monitor and manage the asset as an extension of the current arrangement, which has been in place for several years. Between these two groups there is wide community engagement which ranges from Scout leaders to Community Council members, and all parties with a vested interest in the Park. There is wide community support for the asset transfer, with all local Councillors indicating their approval.

The Forum Ltd. has established key indicators by which performance can be monitored and acted upon, where appropriate. These indicators are from the current year (2018), and as such offer a practical starting point on which to improve.

2. Background of Visitor Services Officer (VSO) Role

Haddo Country Park has enjoyed the services of a VSO, and during the summer months (up to and including 2017), an Assistant Visitor Services Officer (AVSO) thanks to the HLF 'Haddo Country Park Regeneration Project' which concluded on 31st March 2018 but, due to an underspend, was able to continue the employment of a VSO until 31st July 2018. Employment of a VSO has continued with the Forum Ltd. being the employer since 1st August 2018.

3. Benefits of the VSO Role

The addition of a VSO to Haddo Country Park is of great benefit to users of the Park, to all visitors to Haddo and to the profile of Haddo as a major visitor destination in the North East of Scotland. By being available to answer visitors' queries or to give advice on which of the many parts of Haddo House and Haddo Country Park visitors might prefer to see, the VSO is a rare asset that is not found in other country parks. The VSO is able to secure, promote and if necessary run events within the Park that are of general or specific interest to existing and new visitors to Haddo. These include many bushcraft events, storytelling, craft events, walk and talks, subject specific talks, art exhibitions in the Pheasantry and wider Park, photography events that are popular with amateur and professional photographers, children's events including junior bushcraft and a 'blessing of unicorns' involving a number of very prettily made up ponies and their riders from far and wide, disabled riding events, short and long distance runs, Haddo Easter event (principally run by the Rotary Clubs of Ellon and Oldmeldrum but supported and promoted by the VSO) and, along with Aberdeenshire Council and the National Trust for Scotland, a variety of events over a full day or longer in recognition of 'The Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology' in 2017 and in 2018 'The Year of Young People'.

4. Asset and Lease

The asset in question is the car park at Haddo as well as the income from all Park activities. There is currently no charge to park at Haddo or to use any of the Park facilities, the latter of which we wholly support, we believe the Park should be a free facility for all. However, payment for the car park (and overflow by extension, when required) would allow the Forum Ltd. to continue employment of a VSO,

the benefits of which have already been covered. The Forum Ltd. requests a 30 year lease with the possibility of extension thereafter.

The Forum Ltd. intends to charge for most parking at Haddo thus funding the above position. There will be the option of a seasonal car parking pass for regular visitors, and busses used for school outings will remain free to park at no cost, although a donation would be welcomed. These monies will be further supplemented by income from events organised by the VSO, and from charges made to external event organisers wishing to use the Park as a venue.

The Forum Ltd. would hope to have the parking meters in place by early spring 2019. Please see additional spreadsheet (Appendix A) for costs relating to parking meters and income of same.

5. Management of the Project and Community Engagement

The Forum Ltd. is principally responsible for the management of the project and subsequent VSO. Line management of the VSO falls to one of the Directors of the Forum Ltd., who is also the Forum Secretary. The Forum Directors are also part of a larger group which is made up of all interested parties at Haddo and the wider community: Aberdeenshire Council, local Councillors, Scout Leaders, Community Council Members, Mrs Smith's Tearoom (business owner), the National Trust for Scotland and local Rotary members. The meeting is open to anyone from the local community with an interest in Haddo, and diverse membership is encouraged. The group meets every six weeks.

In addition to the community groups directly involved in the management of the Park, the VSO has established innumerable contacts within the local community and actively encourages engagement via social media and in person. Outreach is a large part of the VSO role; the VSO monitors all local websites and social media pages to assure the offering at the Park is representative of community needs, and appropriate to the site. This network continues to grow, and ever more local wildlife groups are now requesting to work with the Park to educate and inform the public.

It has previously been possible to provide transport for people from socially disadvantaged areas, which is something the members of the Forum Ltd. and VSO would be keen to replicate. The Park is such a fantastic facility and one which should be available to as wide an audience as possible; if funds are available it would be our intention to schedule busses from socially disadvantaged areas during the peak season with the offer of an activity (where possible) during their visit. This may be something as simple as a walk and talk, or a wildfowl awareness talk with the provision of birdseed to demonstrate appropriate wildlife feeding.

6. Policies, Systems and Procedures

The VSO is primarily responsible for implementation of the Health and Safety policy at events. Risk assessments are completed for events to ensure identified risks are mitigated and that all volunteers and participants are risk aware. The VSO is also responsible for the completion of accident reports; the position also requires a current first aid qualification. The Forum Ltd. has an insurance policy in place which covers activities, and requests external activity providers to have public liabilities insurance of adequate coverage.

Diversity and inclusive practice is a primary objective of the VSO. Making Haddo a place that everyone can enjoy, regardless of ability, is given constant consideration. There have been many volunteers with learning difficulties working in the Park over recent years, and we continue to identify such opportunities. The proposed development of the sensory garden is being highlighted as an area of specific interest to people who have sensory deficits, as well as being an area of well-being and tranquillity.

Booking of events, and the Park in general, is performed primarily via the VSO. Larger events (Easter and Halloween) are booked using an external ticket agent, but all enquiries are received and dealt with through the VSO.

7. Financial Policy and Agreements

The Forum Ltd. agrees to pay Aberdeenshire Council 10% of profits from car parking charges and events, payable on an annual basis. In return for this Aberdeenshire Council should agree to maintain the car park (and by extension the overflow car park) as well as maintaining the Park (and structures therein) to at least the standard achieved in 2017/18.

The Company is subject to the same financial and legislative conditions that attach to any company operating in Scotland. The accounts are audited each year by J M Taylor Accountants Ltd. of Ellon and the Directors confirm their observance of requirements from National Government and Companies House. A set of accounts will be provided for Aberdeenshire Council on an annual basis which will include a confirmation statement from the Accountants confirming the amount of annual profit.

8. Risks

Given the proposed project is not a huge shift from the current arrangement the Forum Ltd. does not feel there are significant risks. The biggest risk would be if the income from the car park and events is less than the costs required to cover the salary of the VSO. Please see additional spreadsheet of projected costs and income (Appendix B).

Risk	Impact	Steps to Mitigate
Financial		
Lower than projected income/ Costs higher than predicted	Lack of money for events and general running costs.	Events would have to be zero outlay, which is something we have already achieved. Increase efforts to encourage parking meter use. Seek out additional funding sources, target local businesses for sponsorship. Reduce hours of SVSO in years 2 and 3 to save expenditure.
Staff Illness		
Prolonged absence of VSO.	Events schedule would suffer.	The Forum Ltd. need to keep good communication with the VSO to assure there is a good understanding of what is needed for events.
	Two salaries would be required if cover could be found.	Flexibility within the budget should assure a position could be covered for minimum of three months.
Governance		
Multiple partners with conflicting requirements and operating methods.	A less than cohesive offering at Haddo.	Increased communication, particularly by those on the ground at Haddo.
	Unexpected costs or expectations.	The Forum Ltd. and Aberdeenshire Council must try to pin down all details prior to transfer. All costs associated with the transfer must be agreed upon up front. All maintenance requirements should be discussed and agreed, and details

Risk	Impact	Steps to Mitigate
		like lights for Halloween (access to maintenance shed), access to tools, locked gardens should be agreed. Agree whether the relationship with the Council changes in terms of reporting issues or asking for assistance, as occasionally happens.
Operational		
Loss of current VSO.	Events schedule is at risk and vast knowledge lost.	A detailed procedure including contacts needs to be in place. A password file should be developed which is shared with the Forum Secretary.
Compliance (Law & Regulation)		
Insurance of third party providers being inadequate.	Legal implications should there be an incident or accident.	Require all third party providers to provide PL insurance and certificates which should be kept on file along with risk assessment.

9. Project Plan

The VSO is already in place and has a rolling event calendar, which is added to as opportunities arise – this will continue for the foreseeable future.

The Forum Ltd. is currently seeking best value for money on parking meters and would hope to have the meters and additional signage in position by spring 2019.

10. Management Plan

Ongoing management of the project will continue to be administered by the Forum Ltd. and wider Haddo Forum Group.

Members of the Forum Ltd. include experienced professionals and community leaders, all of whom have vast experience of managing projects and complex properties. There is an admin team at their disposal that can provide payroll processing and accounts support/invoice processing and payment.

Our main management goal is to continue to increase visitor numbers at Haddo via events and general upkeep/improvement of park facilities. We would also like to increase the involvement of local people via volunteer opportunities. Education is another important factor as children, in particular, can learn about nature and wildlife in a safe and pleasant environment.

The VSO will continue to manage the day to day administration of the project, and the Forum Ltd. will be responsible for the installation, maintenance and provision of staff/volunteers to encourage visitors to use parking meters.

11. Project Costs and Financial Appraisal

Please see Appendix B and C.

12. Marketing and Communications Strategy

Communication, promotion and marketing are key to delivering the goals of the project. Continued development of the social media audience via regular posts, competitions, engagement and communication of important wildlife concerns will keep the audience interested and growth stable.

Social media has become an incredibly valuable marketing tool in relation to selling events, and will continue to do so. The current VSO is a member of most heavily followed pages across the NE of Scotland and uses them to share events and activities or important information. This has been very successful in selling tickets to a remote audience, and has brought many first time visitors to the park.

We encourage guest blogs on the website, and this is something we can become more active in promoting as there are many amateur and professional wildlife enthusiasts who would be happy to have another platform.

Press coverage at Haddo has increased greatly in the past 18 months and this is a relationship we will continue to nurture. Many journalists now follow the Haddo Facebook page and regularly contact the VSO to ask if they can write a story. The VSO also sends releases out to a broad range of press contacts whenever anything of note happens in the park.

13. Monitoring and Evaluation

In 2018 there were 114 events/activities the VSO was either directly responsible for organising or facilitating. Those events saw in excess of 15,000 people coming to Haddo, which is approximately 7% of all visitors per annum. It is also noted that many first time visitors come because of an organised event or activity, and they all enthusiastically say they will keep coming back now they have been introduced.

The annual visitor survey was introduced at the commencement of the Heritage Lottery Fund project, and has proved invaluable in 'taking the temperature' of visitor satisfaction. We continue to receive very good feedback, and have taken action where issues have been highlighted: for example, introducing more benches so people with mobility issues can still enjoy the Park. All parties are keen to continue with surveys as an evaluation tool.

Haddo has been the proud recipient of several awards over the last few years. The Park received the Green Flag, which is awarded to green spaces of outstanding natural beauty; Haddo was given two Raring2Go awards: Best Family Attraction and runner up in the Readers' Award, which is overall, favourite family attraction in the north east of Scotland. Haddo has also been awarded with the Trip Advisor Preferred Tourist Attraction certificate for two years running. We endeavour to retain these awards and gain more where possible.

The car counting equipment in the main car park and Craigie Wood allows us to ascertain the amount of vehicles using Haddo, and has been very useful in determining not only annual visitors, but popularity of specific events. It is hoped that we can continue to monitor numbers via this facility.

Using all of the above methods the Forum Ltd. will continue to monitor added value to the Park. Income from parking and events will also serve as an evaluation tool, with the expectation that income will increase year on year.

14. Board of Directors

Mark Andrew – Factor at Haddo Estate
Anne Forster – retired Head Teacher
Bob Wallis – Scout Leader
Cllr.I.Davidson – Local Councillor

Iain Hawkins – NE Regional General Manager, National Trust for Scotland
Cllr. P Johnston – Local Councillor
Andrew Webster – Tarves Community Council

15. Director Biographies

Mark Andrew is the factor of Haddo Estate and Clerk of the Ythan District Fishery Board. He has carried out both roles for more than 25 years and is involved in a number of local initiatives and Trusts. The Country Park is important to the Estate for attracting people to Haddo and the wider area and for being a much enjoyed place to visit for both employees and residents of Haddo Estate and their families. The Estate wants to participate in the future of Haddo Country Park so that it can always be a special place for wildlife and people.

Anne Forster is a retired Head Teacher/Education Officer with wide connections in the community. She is a member of Rotary whom she represents at the Meldrum Schools Cluster. She leads on Interact and RotaKids and is therefore regularly in schools. Her 30 year involvement with Haddo includes visiting with classes for outdoor education, the annual Rotary Egg Hunt, being a long time Director on the Forum and thus seeing the regeneration of Haddo. As a result she is ever present to advice on educational events and connections with local schools within the context of Haddo.

Robert (Bob) Wallis represents 1st Methlick Scout Group and any other youth organisation that uses the camping area in the Country Park. Now retired from 35 years in the on-shore oil industry, he has some time to give. Bob is committed to looking after the camping rights of young people in the park and to the ongoing use and growth of the park.

Isobel Davidson is a local Councillor for Ellon and District and Chair of the Formartine Area Committee representing the local community as an Aberdeenshire Councillor. She brings specific skills in environmental and protected species management to the board. Isobel lives close to Haddo so values it as a local visitor attraction and park where the community can enjoy wildlife in a safe and peaceful area. As a personal commitment, she volunteers at events at Haddo and supports activities in the park.

Iain Hawkins is an employee and representative of the National Trust for Scotland, employed as a regional General Manager with accountability for 16 properties across the NE of Scotland. He is responsible for 520 paid and voluntary employees and conservation management of some of Scotland's finest built and natural heritage. The company will benefit from 25 years of experience within the culture, visitor experience and business management sector. Iain is committed to protecting Haddo's history, culture, traditions and ensuring exceptional quality standards of visitor experience, now and for future generations.

Paul Johnston is a local Councillor representing Tarves and Pitmedden which covers part of the Country Park. Paul has lived in the area for more than 20 years and has experience of retailing and running an independent wine and beer bar and of setting up and operating Community Development Trusts. He and his family are keen users of Haddo Country Park and he is committed to ensuring the future of the Country Park for visitors in the future.

Andrew Webster represents Tarves Community Council at the Forum. He works for an oil company and has lived in the area for more than 15 years and is a frequent user of Haddo Country Park and wants to assist in shaping the future for Haddo Country Park.

Appendices

Appendix A - Parking Meters

Appendix B - Project Costs

Appendix C - Forecasting