



Seallam! – Hiort na Hearadh

Executive Summary - Business Plan 1.1

July 2021

Northton Heritage Trust

Seallam Visitor Centre

Northton

Isle of Harris

HS3 3JA

Seallam! – Hiort na Hearadh

Gateway to the history, heritage and culture of the Outer Hebrides...

A centre of excellence for genealogy, heritage and culture providing research, learning and experiences for everyone!

history¹ [hist(ə)ri] *n.*

1. the study of past events, particularly in human affairs.
2. the whole series of past events connected with a particular person or thing.

heritage² [her.i.tɪdʒ] *n.*

Our heritage provides clues to our past and how our society has evolved. It helps us examine our history and traditions and enables an awareness about ourselves. Heritage is a keystone of our culture that plays an important role in our politics, society, business and world view.

culture¹ [kʌltʃə] *n.*

1. the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.
2. the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

¹Definitions from Oxford Languages
²www.heritagecouncil.ie

<https://www.hebridespeople.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/seallamvisitorcentre/>

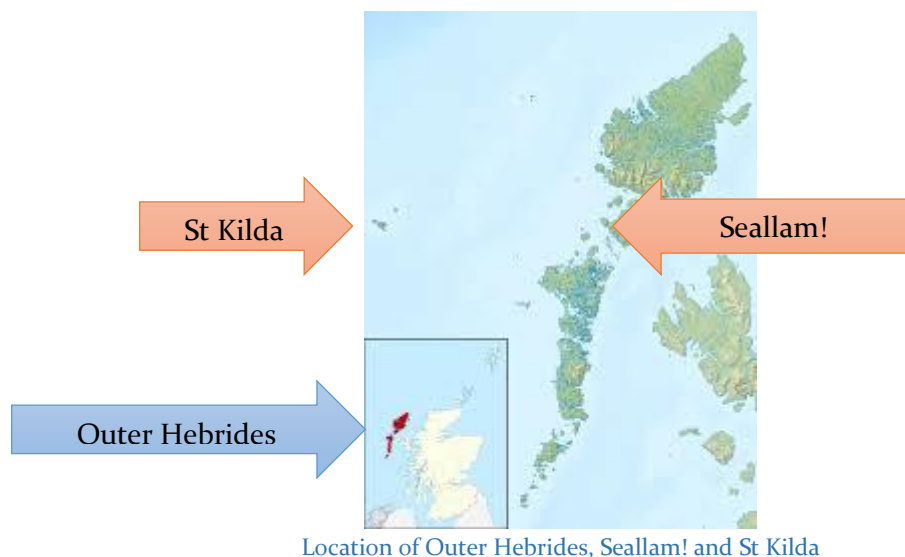
1. Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1. Seallam! (Gaelic for *Let's See!*), is a purpose-built visitor centre, originally established around the genealogical resource Co Leis Thu? (*Who do you belong to?*) built up by Bill and Chris Lawson over the last forty years. The visitor centre houses exhibitions on Harris and St Kilda; island history, emigration and culture, together with a book shop which also sells local crafts and art. The Old Schoolhouse is home to the genealogical records, family trees and croft histories for the whole of the Outer Hebrides from the 1750's to the 1920s including those for St Kilda. This plan describes how this significant and precious resource will be celebrated and developed into a world class visitor centre as part of the Outer Hebrides Destination Development Programme.
- 1.2. The visitor centre has traded well over the last twenty years providing exhibitions, talks and events for locals and visitors to the island and those from further afield via its website [Hebrides People](#) and social media. The long-standing expertise of its resident genealogist Bill Lawson, who created and developed the records and books, enables access to the vast database, its family histories and trees. Bill is now 84 years old and looking to retire so Seallam! which is owned and run by the community as Northton Heritage Trust is beginning a new phase of its history.
- 1.3. Bill Lawson's historical records, the genealogical database and his extensive library were donated to Northton Heritage Trust (NHT) some twenty years ago, as specially established organisation for the purpose of safeguarding and developing them in the long term. No mean feat! NHT has prepared this plan to use Bill's amazing work to promote economic regeneration through genealogy, culture and heritage.

Location

- 1.4. Seallam! Visitor Centre is based in Northton on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides. The Outer Hebrides is a remote archipelago of islands located around 50 miles off the coast of north west Scotland.



Harris – A Visitor Destination

- 1.5. The Island of Harris is an area of extreme natural beauty; beaches and history making it a significant tourist destination. The most recent projections prepared by Ekosgen for Outer Hebrides Tourism in June 2021 suggest that by 2022 the total number of visitors expected on the Outer Hebrides is 202,769 with 46% of those new visitors and 63% repeat visitors. Their anticipated spend is £75,193,591¹ with 20% of that projected for Harris - £14,399,649. This figure is projected to rise year on year by 2.5% without taking account of any uplift from improved visitor attractions or any increase in cruise liner visitors.
- 1.6. Visitor attractions on South Harris are very few and far between, with the medieval St Clement's Church in Rodel run by Historic Environment Scotland, the third most visited place on Harris after the distillery and the Harris Tweed Weaving Centre². There are no museums or visitor centres to cater for the large numbers of visitors with the exception of Seallam!

Harris - A Fragile Economy

- 1.7. South Harris, the 55th most remote geographical community in Scotland according to the [SIMD Map](#)³. The area has a population of 877, with 480 of working age, including almost 20% (92) who are income deprived and 7% who are employment deprived. An aging population and decades of depopulation mean that many young people leave to access education, a trend which according to projections from the National Records of Scotland is set to

¹ Ekosgen. Outer Hebrides Visitor Volume and Value Forecast. Outer Hebrides Tourism. June 2021

² Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey. 2017. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and VisitScotland (Progressive)

³ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

continue at a rate of 6.1% between 2018 and 2028⁴. The last significant economic development or investment in South Harris was the introduction of the Leverburgh Berneray ferry 25 years ago and there are few employment opportunities. The area is underserved in terms of infrastructure and there are few local amenities

- 1.8. South Harris is a remote rural community with high living costs and lower than average incomes, which has seen almost no economic development investment. Around a third of its population is over 65 with the average for the Outer Hebrides 25% and it has 2% fewer young people under 15.⁵ **There is a need to create employment and opportunity to retain the existing population and encourage more economically active people to move there.**
- 1.9. The development of Seallam! as a visitor destination and place of learning about the history, heritage and culture of Harris and the Outer Hebrides, including St Kilda, builds on decades of work developed by Bill and Chris Lawson, recognised across the world as a centre of excellence in the genealogy of the area. It provides an excellent backdrop for the economic regeneration of South Harris through its history, heritage and culture. Furthermore, Seallam! will form part of a wider destination development programme for the whole of the Outer Hebrides including the Slighe Hiort (St Kilda Trail), the Callanish Centre and the Iolaire Centre.

Slighe Hiort – The St Kilda Trail

- 1.10. St Kilda is a now uninhabited group of islands, a further 40 miles off the west coast of Harris. The last remaining residents of St Kilda were evacuated to the mainland on 29 August 1930 at their own request as life had become unsustainable for the 30 people left. The islands had been inhabited for around two thousand years and are of significant interest having been awarded dual UNESCO World Heritage Status on account of Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage.
- 1.11. Plans are being developed to recognise and celebrate the unique history and heritage of St Kilda through the creation of **Slighe Hiort** (the St Kilda Trail) which will provide the opportunity to learn more about this special place, without visiting: the cliffs and birds so important to life on the islands (**Ionad Hiort, Lewis**), the cultural and genealogical heritage (**Seallam! – Hiort na Hearadh, Harris**) and the defence and maritime matters it has become important for today (**Sealladh Hiort, North Uist**). The St Kilda Trail will create

⁴ The Outer Hebrides, Community Dept, Socio Economic Update No 43. March 2021. CnES

⁵ Socio Economic Update No 41. December 2019 CNES, Communities Department

a journey though the Outer Hebrides enabling visitors (either in person or digitally) to experience what life was like on this even more remote archipelago of four islands and several sea stacks home to one of the largest gannet colonies in the UK. The visitor centres are essential to help preserve St Kilda's unique characteristics and enable more people to experience this special place without making the difficult sea journey which is only possible for four or five months of the year. Plans for the operation of Slighe Hiort are being developed by the three organisations, with each also developing their own dedicated local facility.

- 1.12. Harris was the registration centre for people living on St Kilda and women often travelled to Leverburgh to have their babies so there are strong ties to Harris, making Seallam! the natural choice of location for telling the story of the people, culture and heritage of St Kilda as part of Slighe Hiort. The Lawson Library also has a rich archive of interviews and stories about St Kilda and life on the islands which will be brought to life in a new bespoke Hiort na Hearadh exhibition

Proposed Economic Benefits

- 1.13. Northton Heritage Trust's development of Seallam! will offer a range of benefits

- A world class visitor destination and learning centre (genealogy and Gaelic)
- Community ownership and development of a heritage resource of significant importance to the people of the Outer Hebrides
- Development of Northton Township as a place and the creation of a destination to encourage footfall and exploration
- The updating of current exhibits and the creation of a new, interactive St Kilda exhibit as part of the St Kilda Trail, a joined-up approach to tourism throughout the Outer Hebrides
- Development of affordable accommodation for student research and study together with new courses of study, particularly in Gaelic to enable local people and those from further afield to gain qualifications
- Creation of at least 3 new full-time jobs and supporting 6 construction jobs during development
- Enhance partnership working with a wide range of partners to deliver better outcomes for everyone (Slighe Hiort projects across islands)
- Re energising of a cultural and events Hub on Harris
- Seallam! Outdoors A new adventure play and learning resource for Harris celebrating its crofting history and the neighbouring SSSI (Northton Bay)
- A Tea room and public toilets
- RA "Green" and sustainable resource for the future

Governance

- 1.14. The project will be delivered by Northton Heritage Trust (NHT) through a charitable community benefit society, with a locally elected Board. A community share offer is planned for later this year and this will generate income towards the new visitor offer and enable both local people and the diaspora to have a stake in the future of Seallam! It is be managed by a business manager, supported by a heritage officer (funded by the Heritage Lottery) and front house staff and volunteers.

Community Owned and Run Social Enterprise

- 1.15. NHT currently owns the Seallam! Visitor centre building and the car park and plans are advanced to bring the whole corner site into its ownership with support from the Scottish Land Fund, prior to extending the current building to house a new St Kilda exhibit, enlarged book shop and café facilities. The student accommodation block will be self-standing on the site between the Old School House and the Visitor Centre and the Genealogy Centre will be upgraded. Seallam! Outdoors will occupy the rest of the site.

Building on Solid Foundations - Developing the Site



Site before Seallam! c 1999



Seallam! Visitor Centre now – 2021

- 1.16. Plans for the site will see it developed to create an impressive new visitor centre with an extended car park with a bridge over to the extended building which will have a roof inspired by Stac Lee, part of the St Kilda archipelago. The extension will include a café and entertainment space with new Harris and St Kilda exhibition spaces. A 12-bed student accommodation block will stand next door and the Old Schoolhouse, which houses the Genealogy Centre will be upgraded to tie the site together. The remaining land is part of the SSSI – Northton Bay, so will be sympathetically landscaped to provide education and interpretation of this as well as an outdoor learning exhibit celebrating the

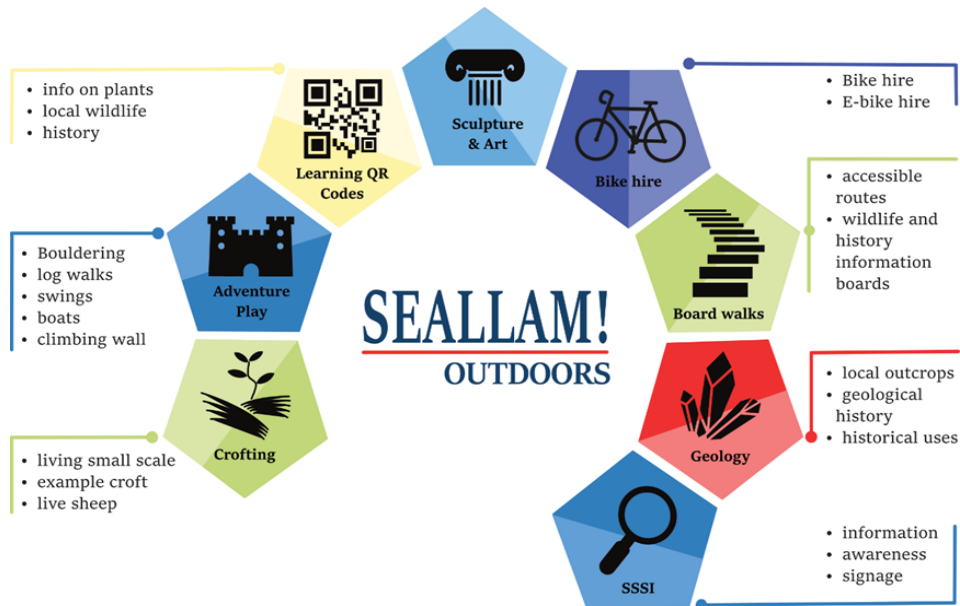
crofting heritage of the island – Seallam! Outdoors. Plans below show the potential to phase the development should funding necessitate this

Site Overview

Proposed Landscaping



Aerial view of site, showing buildings and Seallam! Outdoors – GLM Conceptual Design Final



Seallam! Outdoors – celebrating Harris’ natural wonders

Funding Matrix for delivering works

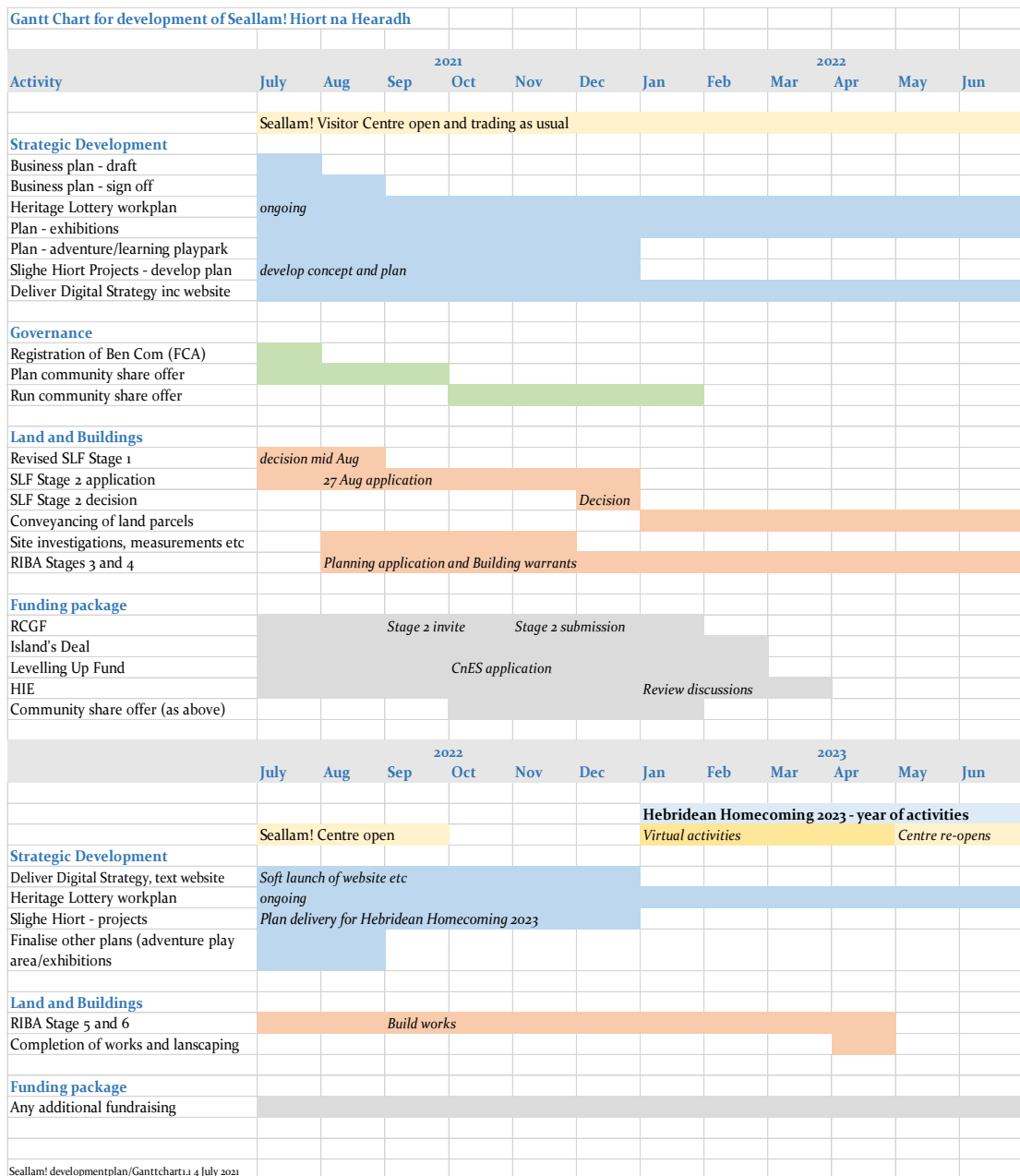
- 1.17. The proposed costs for developing the site and the exhibitions are £3.6 m.
- 1.18. The works on site will be funded through a consortium of funders including income from a planned community share offer from local shareholders and the diaspora from all over the world. Negotiations are well advanced with a range of partners and while none of the funding is guaranteed all efforts are underway to ensure that the plan described in the table below can be delivered.

Funding Source	Status	Amount
Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) with CNES	Stage 1 application submitted Outcome anticipated Sept 2021	£800,000
Islands Deal – Destination Development Programme with HIE	Economic outline business case in preparation	£1,600,000
Levelling Up Fund with CnES and UK Government	Stage 1 application submitted to CnES	£1,000,000
HIE	Agreement to apply if required	£100,000
NHT Community Share offer	Planned for late 2021	£100,000
Total		£3,600,000

The Timeline for delivery

- 1.19. Work on consolidating the current Seallam! Project is underway and new staff already in place to support the delivery of the genealogy services and develop the educational offer. The 2023 Hebridean Homecoming year is the target date to have the new offer in place. Re-branding of the Seallam! offer is currently underway and this will be accompanied by a marketing campaign to ensure effective promotion of new offers as they come online, together with the overall launch of the enhanced visitor attraction. The remainder of 2021 will see the consolidation of land ownership, pre-build planning and survey works together with on-going negotiations with funders. The community share offer is planned for the latter part of the year. Seallam! will remain open and trading until build works start in 2022, Covid permitting.

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1.20. Cashflow Years 1 – 5 Available separately



Acknowledgements

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Scottish Land Fund



Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar



Investing in what matters



Cover logo curtesy Karen Mackay Design

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