

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	12
Report No	SR/16/24

Committee: Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee

Date: 26 August 2024

Report Title: The Storr – Update Report 24/25

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on the progress at The Old Man of Storr (The Storr).
- 1.2 The Storr and associated path network is a major tourist draw on the Isle of Skye and attracts more than 250,000 visitors per year. The total number of visitors in 2023 was 274,000. The number of visitors from January 2024 to July 2024 was 178,000. The annual projection for 2024 visitor numbers is between 285,000 and 300,000 which is approximately 9% higher on prior year.

Month	The Storr				
	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
January	4,000	405	2,363	3,716	7,130
February	4,049	305	3,495	4,751	5,044
March	7,674	317	7,588	9,457	15,537
April	23,269	1,775	19,794	27,113	27,029
May	28,783	13,026	23,462	37,337	42,675
June	28,771	18,916	26,672	35,514	36,822
July	36,483	24,663	33,974	43,769	43,945
August	38,256	30,309	35,468	43,657	
September	24,806	20,813	23,617	33,175	
October	17,167	14,660	17,110	22,651	
November	6,387	4,436	6,135	7,563	
December	4,335	4,512	5,378	5,305	
Total	223,978	134,137	205,056	274,009	178,182

Reports will continue to be reported to this Committee detailing progress against the improvements and developments at the site. This report details the progress delivered in 2024 to date. It is also important to note that further developments are also planned

in this project. All developments are strategically aligned to the Place Based Investment framework for the Area, known as Skye & Raasay Future (SARF).

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the ongoing local Member involvement and established governance through an Officer-led cross-Service Project Board
- ii. Note the ongoing partnership working including with NatureScot, SkyeConnect, and the local community, including suppliers
- iii. Note the significant achievements being delivered by the Project and the continued progress being made
- iv. Note that regular reports will continue to be taken to the Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – implications are discussed throughout this report. The Project Sponsor is the ACE – Corporate, and the project is managed by existing resources within THC.

3.2 **Legal** – there are no legal implications arising from this report.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – this report details work being undertaken to further enhance the site, the visitor experience, and income, with further benefits to the local community and economy.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – a critical aspect informing the study was assessing how the Storr can both prepare itself and support the community for the future. Modern projects with the kind of potential seen at the Storr must consider and include as high a degree of sustainability, and low environmental impact as possible. The Storr presents THC with an opportunity to put into practice policies that commit to reducing environmental impact and safeguarding natural habitats for future generations.

3.5 **Risk** – risks continue to be managed through the Project Board.

3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – there are no health & safety implications arising from this report.

3.7 **Gaelic** – The Storr has a particular opportunity to support Gaelic via effective promotion of Gaelic culture to visitors via initiatives such as effective bilingual signage, site interpretation, the Storr website and social media page, and the development of high-quality materials via partnership initiatives such as the Skye Iconic Sites Project and engagement with local community trusts.

4 Background

4.1 A range of stakeholder and community engagement was conducted, which included a series of consultations with a variety of stakeholders and parties with active interests in the Storr, which resulted in a Business Case, which was approved by the Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee. Throughout this project, the Council has engaged with internal partners (staff from a range of Services, Members) and external partners in the community to deliver positive change at the site and generate new income helping to deliver sustainable tourism.

4.2 Governance is conducted through a Project Board chaired by the ACE - Corporate. Governance provides the required authority to progress the project, through direction and decision making. Supporting project documentation includes a Project Plan which enables monitoring of progress, delivery of outcomes, timings, and risks. There is robust project budget management, monitoring, recording, and forecasting of spend. Critical to the approach is, right from the outset, regular involvement of local Members and their support and involvement continues and is much appreciated by the Project Team. Importantly, regular updates are also provided to the Area Business Meetings and Area Committees to ensure ongoing scrutiny of the project. Risks associated with the project are subject to regular review and are pro-actively monitored and managed.

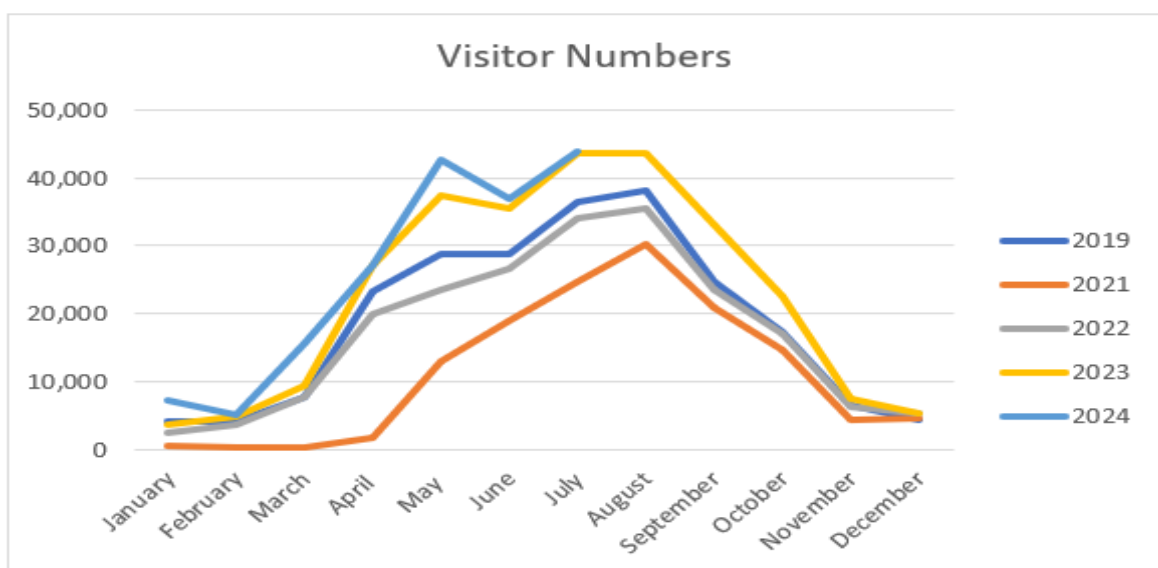
5 Progress

5.1 This section details the progress made in this project during 2024.

- 5.2
- Section 6 – Visitor Numbers and Satisfaction
 - Section 7 – On-Site Resourcing
 - Section 8 – Net Zero – EV Chargers
 - Section 9 – Digitisation
 - Section 10 – Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre)
 - Section 11 – Project Finance
 - Section 12 – Guided Walks
 - Section 13 – Community Wealth Building
 - Section 14 – Weddings
 - Section 15 – Education and Promotion of Culture
 - Section 16 – The Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards

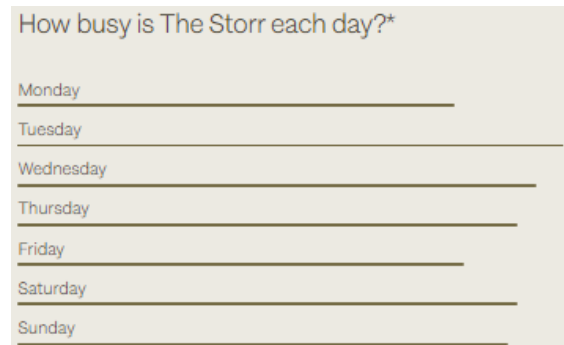
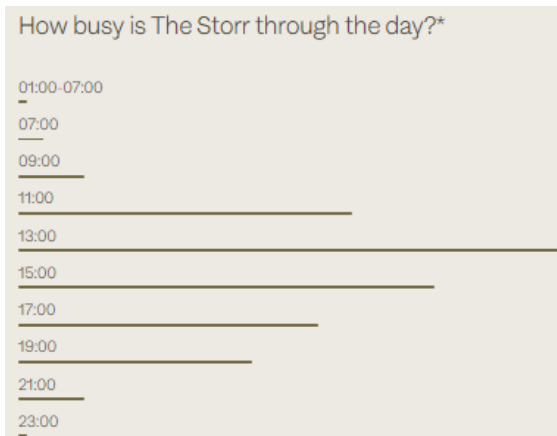
6 Visitor Numbers and Satisfaction

6.1 Pre-pandemic, visitor numbers saw an annual increase at the Storr. Visitor numbers are increasing again post-Covid, as seen below. Visitor numbers for 2024 are forecasted to be between 285,000 and 300,000 which is a 9% increase on prior year.



The project team recognises the value of maintaining a range of data and information. For example, for visitor numbers we record this at a per hour per day basis. This in turn supports our workforce planning, hours of business, and general visitor management.

For example, at our dedicated website includes a range of information which is available to prospective customers which can inform when they choose to visit. The data below is based on average visitor data collected at the site; actual visitor numbers vary from day to day.



- 6.2 Customer satisfaction at the Storr is very positive. For example, this can be evidenced by the recent Traveller’s Choice Award (Winner 2024) from TripAdvisor which now ranks The Old Man of Storr in the top 10% of places to visit worldwide. This is an outstanding achievement. Other examples include where customers via Instagram, Google etc are able to leave feedback about any particular services.



7 On-Site Resourcing

- 7.1 Member support was given to establish dedicated posts, based at the Storr. The Storr team provide a contact for visitors and are able to educate and spread awareness of the site such as path conditions, geology, history, work to maintain and upkeep the site, including litter picking and car park monitoring, and to administer first aid. The presence of the on-site team also provides an opportunity for increased parking revenue as visitors are more likely to pay for parking if they are aware of THC staff at the Storr. These posts support the creation of local employment opportunities and skills development in Skye & Raasay, as well as providing additional car park enforcement. The introduction of dedicated resource supports improved protection of the site; any degradation can be immediately addressed.
- 7.2 The Storr has created 5 x full time positions in the local community. Four posts have been filled with the remaining post, Visitor Experience Supervisor in recruitment. Members are reminded that the new staff welfare cabin has already been provided to support the staff and their general welfare.

A photo of the team and the welfare cabin can be seen below.



8 Net Zero – EV Chargers

8.1 The Storr is a remote location, dependent on transport infrastructure for access. Development at the Storr therefore presented the perfect opportunity to align the site with the wider Council ambition to expand sustainable travel provision via EV support. Given the nature of an average visit to the Storr generally involving an approximately two hours walk, the site is particularly well suited to offering EV charging. Two x EV chargers (one x AC and one x DC) have been installed at the site and are operational – this allows four cars to charge at any one time.

Full funding was received for the EV connections and chargers and further information on the funding is detailed later in this report. Income generated from this service will be treated in accordance with Council policy, including any surplus reinvested in the EV network. Images of the chargers, with bilingual signage, can be seen below.



8.2 Both the AC and DC charger points have been fully operational since installation (July 2024) and there has been no disruption in service to date. Further information including on actual usage will be reported in future reports to this Committee. Members are also advised that these chargers also appear on Charge Place Scotland which promotes the availability of this service (www.chargeplacescotland.org).

9 Digitisation

9.1 The Storr website (thestorr.com) and social media site (Instagram – [the.storr](https://www.instagram.com/the.storr)) have been developed for the Storr and are live. Both the website and social media spread awareness of the Storr, enable visitors to better plan their trip with access to key

information such as path conditions or weather forecasts, and promote education specifically around local history, geology, culture, and Gaelic. Social media posts are also bilingual. S&R Councillor Munro (and Chair of THC Gaelic Committee) supports the Gaelic translation work. Throughout this project, the promotion of Gaelic is important and this is reflected in a number of ways, including the improvement of interpretation panels.

10 Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre)

- 10.1 A physical, modular unit Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) has been installed on the site to progress economic development in the community. This work was undertaken by Modular West, who are based in Barra. Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) opened to the public on 1 July 2024. The official opening of the centre is the 26 August 2024.
- 10.2 Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) includes a sales space, stock room, and a multipurpose space which is available for use for local art installations, and small wedding ceremonies. It is fully accessible and disabled bays are planned to be installed for improved access from the car park. The toilet facilities contain a disabled toilet which is fully accessible and inclusive. Images can be found in Appendix 1.
- 10.3 High-quality and stylish lifestyle goods are stocked in Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre), including many items sold by local suppliers and Storr branded goods, with positive reviews from consumers on the selection. Products are locally made where possible and are relevant to the Storr or the Isle of Skye and Raasay. The offering includes t-shirts, mugs, and magnets, amongst other items, at a range of price points. Work is underway to obtain an alcohol licence to allow alcohol sales in Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre). All suppliers are subject to an evaluation process in order to ensure consistency and fairness when stocking items in the centre. Branded stock for sale in the store is owned and managed by THC. Payments are made in GBP and by card payment in person. The unit does not hold cash on its premises. This reduces any risk of theft, removes any responsibility on the on-site team, and increases safety and security on site.

Suppliers are politely reminded to get in touch with The Storr via the website or directly emailing thestorr@highland.gov.uk to discuss the stocking of products in the centre.

The project team continues to develop the ecommerce solution to complement the services already available.

11 Project Finance

- 11.1 The project has been supported by various funding sources, Members are reminded of funding sources and amounts below.

	Source	Amount	Use
Finance Secured	Place Based Investment Fund	£57,000	Staff Salaries Y1
	Coastal Communities Fund	£57,000	Staff Salaries Y2
	Coastal Communities Fund	£20,000	Staff Cabin
	S&R Ward Match Funding	£60,000	Storr Centre
	Islands Infrastructure Fund	£420,000	Storr Centre
	Islands Infrastructure Fund	£20,000	EV Connections
	Community Regeneration Fund	£51,162	EV Chargers
	Total	£685,162	

Final cost estimates for Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) and the EV chargers and connections are that they will come in on budget.

During 22/23 and 23/24, to support car park enforcement, path maintenance, and general visitor management, the one-off funding provided by the Place Based Investment fund and Coastal Communities fund, helped to manage the site but also to support the preparation and delivery of the developments at the Storr including Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre).

The projected annual surplus income is £300k after allowing for costs. Final figures for 24/25 will be reported in 2025 when they are available, recognising the ongoing development of the centre. As mentioned earlier in this report, project finances are monitored on an ongoing basis.

Members are reminded that they approved a change to the Storr car parking pricing strategy from April 2023. Details pertaining to car parking income overall is reported separately within the Council and this income has not been included in the projected annual surplus income of £300k.

12 Guided Walks

- 12.1 Guided walks are now available for visitors to the Storr. These walks are led by the Storr staff with the initial price of £5 per person and take up of this service will be monitored closely so as to continually review the pricing strategy. The walks are educational with a mix of information on the geology, the history, and the myths of the Storr. Walks are advertised on the Storr Instagram page ([the.storr](#)). The Storr staff will ensure that the walks are suitable for all ages and abilities, with colouring in sheets available for children. The Storr staff also intend to offer walks free of charge once per month to community groups who benefit from an activity day. Please contact thestorr@highland.gov.uk to express an interest.

13 Community Wealth Building

- 13.1 The project aligns with THC strategy as referenced at Highland Council Committee on 29th June 2023 '[Developing a Community Wealth Building Strategy](#)'. Whilst the Old Man of Storr is a draw for many international visitors to the Isle of Skye each year, the site holds great importance for the community surrounding it. As well as some income being reinvested in the Area, the community also benefits from economic development as a result of the project. This project has created local employment opportunities as well as working in partnership with local suppliers and contractors. The project mainly benefits the Isle of Skye and Raasay, but the wider area will also benefit from tourism spend as visitors are likely to go elsewhere in the Highlands during their trip. Items sold in the retail unit are sourced from Skye and Raasay where possible, and where items are not available, they are sourced from the Highlands or Scotland where possible. This benefits artisans in the wider community as a result.

14 Weddings

- 14.1 Whilst the Storr is not a suitable venue for full-scale weddings, the site is already used for outdoor ceremonies in conjunction with THC registrars. Skye is a popular wedding destination due to the scenery, however, Skye can experience unpredictable weather conditions, which puts outdoor weddings at risk. For this reason, the multipurpose space within Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) can be used for wedding ceremonies and is another example of an income generation opportunity that develops existing Council services. Work continues to take this matter forward and those interested should contact thestorr@highland.gov.uk in the first instance.

15 Education and Promotion of Culture

- 15.1 Building on the work to date on the promotion of Gaelic, including the updating of the interpretation panels, further work is intended to be undertaken. This will include displaying educational resources at Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) and could be in the form of educational panels, Gaelic events, and information displayed on screens. Educational materials will also focus on local culture, heritage, flora and fauna, history, and Gaelic. Gaelic is of huge importance to the Isle of Skye and Raasay and the wider region, with the island being home to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (National Centre for Gaelic Learning and Culture). This project aims to continue to educate visitors on Gaelic culture by including stories, poems, and songs on signage, on the Old Man of Storr website, and in Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) itself. Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre) also aims to promote Gaelic by working closely with local artisans and hosting Gaelic events in the space which maximises exposure to Gaelic, spreads awareness, involves the community, and improves education.

16 The Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards

- 16.1 This project was recently recognised in The Highland Council Staff Recognition Awards in 2024 when it received the Convenor's Award. Convenor of The Highland Council, Councillor Bill Lobban, said "Projects like the Storr Project show what the council can achieve in terms of innovation and income generation while working all the time closely with key stakeholders within the council, the community and with local members".

Designation: ACE – Corporate

Date: 16 August 2024

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Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Images of Ionad an Stòir (Storr Centre)



