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Ino. H. Hall

Hill comes alive!

WORK has begun on a £400,000 visitor centre at Bennachie.

It is expected that the centre near Esson's car park near Chapel of Garioch, will attract 30,000 to 50,000 visitors a year.

The Bennachie visitor Centre is a joint project led by Gordon District Council in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission, Grampian Enterprise Limited and the Bailies of Bennachie.

Due for completion in the autumn, it will become the base for the district council's ranger service headed by Fred Gordon.

The circular building is based on designs submitted for architectural competitions organised by the district council's planning department.

The final design will incorporate many natural features of Gordon, including hill forts, stone circles and standing stones.

Planning convener, Councillor Norman Donald said: "The main purpose of the centre is not to attract thousands more people to Bennachie because that could have a negative impact on the environment but to make the hill and its surroundings 'come alive' in a sense."

He added: "We don't doubt that people of all ages, from within and without the district, get a lot of pleasure from outings on Bennachie.

"But this new centre has been devised in such a way that it will add to their enjoyment of the hill through presenting, in an appealing and entertaining way, aspects of its history and environment."

It will use a variety of methods to put across the story of Bennachie, its wildlife, the people who used to live and work on the hill and other aspects of the hill and surrounding countryside and communities.

The Forestry Commission, who manage Bennachie Forest, have leased the site for the building.

They are working closely with the other partners to



ensure that their existing car parks and recreational facilities are fully intergrated with the centre.

The centre will be managed by a trust whose members are: Provost Raymond Bisset, Bennachie Bailies James Mackay and Algie Watson, broadcaster Frieda Morrison, Scottish Wildlife Trust representative John Hardy and Norman Donald.

Checking drawings for the centre are (from left) Provost Raymond Bisset, Gordon ranger Fred Gordon, Scottish Natural Heritage Officer Kenny Steele, Gordon planning officer Chris White and Forestry Commission district manager Duncan Davidson.