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Centring on Bennachie

By STEVE MCKENZIE

WORK has started on the £400,000 Bennachie Visitor Centre on Gordon's most famous landmark.

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

Scottish Natural Heritage are providing a £100,000 grant towards the project which will be the first major information centre on the hill.

Being built near Esson's car park on the slopes of Bennachie near Chapel of Garioch and at the eastern end of the West Gordon Way trail, it will be the new base for the district ranger service headed by Fred Gordon.

The circular centre is based on designs submitted for architectural competitions run by the council's planning department.

The winning entry incorporates many natural features of the area - including hill forts, stone circles and standing stones - and is expected to attract 30,000-50,000 visitors a year.

Said planning convener Norman Donald: "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 said the centre will add to



View from a hill: Checking the drawings of the new Bennachie Centre on the site are (from left) Gordon Provost Raymond Bisset, Bailies Algje Watson and James Mackay and Span Construction site agent Duncan Thomson.

local folk's and visitors' enjoyment of the hill through presentations of its history and environment.

And the facility will use a variety of methods to put across the story of Bennachie, its wildlife, the people who used to live and work on it and surrounding countryside and communities.

The Forestry Commission, who manage Bennachie Forest,

have leased the site for the building.

They are also working closely with the other partners to ensure that existing car parks and recreational facilities are fully integrated with the building.

Managing the centre will be a trust made up of Gordon Provost Raymond Bisset, Bennachie Bailies James Mackay and Algje Watson, broadcaster Frieda

Morrison, Scottish Wildlife Trust representative John Hardy and Mr Donald.

Span Construction are the main contractors, architects are Dodd Jamieson Partnership, Edinburgh, and several design, interpretation and countryside consultants have been involved in the project.

It is due to be completed this autumn.