

Charity Number SCO49973



Invitation to Tender: Auld Lang Syne Project, Interpretation Plan

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Overview

This document sets out a unique opportunity to shape how generations engage with one of the world's most atmospheric and influential literary sites. This Invitation to Tender is for an **Interpretation Plan (IP)** for Ellisland Museum and Farm in Dumfriesshire, a key element of *Saving the Home of Auld Lang Syne*, a major heritage project funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Museums Galleries Scotland, South of Scotland Enterprise, and The Holywood Trust.

Ellisland was built by Scotland's national poet Robert Burns in 1788 for his young wife, Jean Armour, and their family. It remains the most authentic of his homes and was the site where he wrote *Auld Lang Syne*, *Tam o' Shanter*, and around a third of his creative output. The site includes farmland, woodland, and historic paths, some dating from Burns's tenancy. A museum was later established on-site, housing original manuscripts and other items belonging to Burns and his family.

The Robert Burns Ellisland Trust (RBET), established in 2020, is committed to conserving, interpreting, and enhancing the site for public engagement in a sensitive and sustainable way. The Trust is also dedicated to growing and diversifying audiences, particularly engaging young people, and addressing urgent conservation needs for both buildings and collections. The site achieved Accredited Museum status in 2023.

With a Development Stage grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, RBET is now advancing plans to renovate and adapt the site as a sustainable and internationally significant visitor attraction. This phase will work towards submitting a Delivery Stage application to the Heritage Fund in 2026.

The development stage project includes:

- A conservation architect-led design team to develop plans to RIBA Stage 3 (Developed Design), to support the Delivery Stage Application
- The commissioning of an Interpretation Plan (IP) as a critical element of the development stage to inform both the project's visitor experience and its Delivery Stage funding application.
- The commissioning of a business plan refresh and an Activity Plan to inform both the project's visitor experience and its Delivery Stage funding application.
- A major Fundraising campaign

The teams working on these different elements of the development stage will collaborate closely.

Vision for Ellisland

The Interpretation Plan will help realise the Trust's vision:

“To make Ellisland the place to fall in love with Burns and see nature through the poet's eyes.”

It will also support the Trust's goals to:

- Enhance understanding of Ellisland's central role in Burns's artistic development.
- Showcase its environmental significance as the landscape that inspired his poetry.
- Celebrate Ellisland's place in European Romantic song through a vibrant programme of festivals and events.
- Highlight the contribution of Jean Armour, Burns's life partner.
- Promote Scots language, writing, and music, connecting Burns's legacy to evolving national identities.
- Support Scottish Government cultural outcomes in the national performance framework.
- Create immersive experiences, including creative residencies and visitor engagement.
- Increase and diversify our audiences

The IP is a key part of the development of our plans for the site, helping shape a successful Delivery Stage application to the Heritage Fund and supporting our fundraising efforts. Our plans for Ellisland include new visitor facilities (café, museum, shop, toilets) delivered sympathetically in the historic buildings, creating an events space and a Centre for Song. The plan must also reflect the trust's intention to expand our accommodation offer to generate income and support a creative retreat programme. The recent discovery of the bill of quantities for Ellisland, essentially the list of materials used to build the farmhouse, threshing barn and wee byre) will allow us to recreate the layout and the feel of the interiors and inform the work of both the design team and in Interpretation Plan Consultants.

2.5 Existing buildings: heritage significance

Modern Bungalow

late 20th C., unlisted, little significance*

Originally constructed as farm worker accommodation, this modern 2-bed bungalow has recently been renovated and is leased as holiday accommodation.

Threshing Barn

c. 1790, Category A-listed, exceptional significance*

Constructed as part of the original steading by Robert Burns, the barn was a more-modest structure than the Farmhouse, and would have originally had a thatched roof. Following Burns' departure from Ellisland a horse mill was added within the central courtyard, allowing the process of separation of the grain from the chaff to become horse powered – slots for the belts connecting the horse mill to the threshing machine within the barn can still be observed on the south facade.

Cart Store

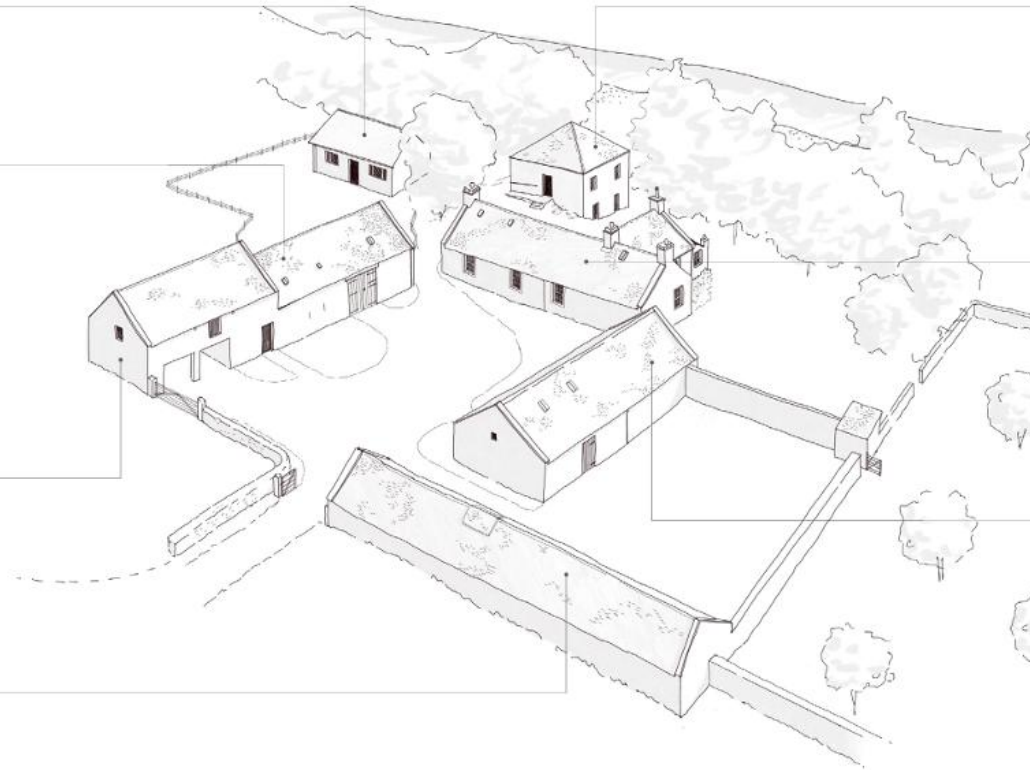
mid-19th C., Category A-listed, considerable significance*

The cart store was added in the mid-19th century. Today the threshing barn is used for small events and workshops, while the cart store accommodates an area of agricultural display alongside a small kitchenette, and storage in the hay loft above.

Long Byre

early 19th C., Category A-listed, considerable significance*

James Taylor purchased the farm in 1805, and constructed several new buildings. A new 'cattle' courtyard for livestock was formed from the existing byre, the long byre, and a piggery along the eastern edge (now demolished). Today the long byre houses agricultural displays and the storage of agricultural machinery.



Granary

early 19th C., Category A-listed, considerable significance*

Constructed following Burns' departure from Ellisland, the granary has undergone several iterations. In addition to a grain store, it was subsequently referred to as a 'ballroom' – a place for socialising in the rural community, and was later used as accommodation for farm workers. Today the upper floor contains exhibition space, while the lower floor has been converted to WC facilities.

Farmhouse

c. 1790, Category A-listed, exceptional significance*

Built by Burns as a family home, and extended to the east shortly following his departure from Ellisland. The entrance would originally have faced onto the main courtyard. The farmhouse is currently arranged as a recreation of Burns' accommodation, while also displaying items from the collection and housing staff offices and facilities as well as a small archive space in the attic.

Wee Byre

c. 1790, Category A-listed, exceptional significance*

The wee byre is the third of the buildings on the site which was constructed by Burns. As an agricultural building it would originally have been thatched, and would have housed the farmyard animals, marking a departure from earlier farming layouts in which cattle would reside in the same building as the family. The wee byre currently houses agricultural displays and interpretation.

Notes

* Grading of heritage significance taken from Adams Napier Partnership, *Ellisland Conservation Plan, Section 3: The Significance of Ellisland Farm*. The report notes that both the setting of the farmstead within the surrounding landscape, and its field structure – likely created by Burns – are also of exceptional significance.

Heritage feature	Interpretive approach / purpose at RIBA2 - may be adapted at RIBA3
Cart store	Orientation
Farmhouse	Immersive restoration– domestic life of Robert and Jean, creative life of the poet
Granary	Display of collection highlights
Threshing Barn	Events / learning / centre for song
Wee Byre	Learning / events space
Long Byre	Café and toilets
Modern bungalow ('Auld Acquaintance')	Accommodation
Landscape	Seeing nature through the eyes of Burns

Scope of the Interpretation Plan

The plan will cover four key areas:

Heritage

- Deepen understanding of Ellisland's role in Burns' artistic development.
- Highlight the role of Jean Armour in Burns's work.

Culture

- Celebrate Scots writing and music.
- Position Ellisland as a Centre for Song, linked to festivals, events, and residencies.

Environment

- Showcase the natural world through Burns's eyes.
- Explore sustainable ways to connect Ellisland to the wider Dumfries region.

Community & Economy

- Align with Scottish Government and Dumfries & Galloway Council cultural and economic strategies.
 - Support skills development and job creation in the rural economy.
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Statement of Requirements

The Interpretation Plan must include:

- Title of the Project
- Our Aims - what we want the interpretation to achieve
- Target audiences (existing and new) – Needs, expectations, and strategies to inspire and engage
- Overarching theme – summarised in one or two sentences.
- Key messages – Three to five key takeaways for visitors
- Learning outcomes – What visitors should feel, learn, and take away.
- Who will be involved in developing the interpretation
- Interpretation tools and techniques – Recommendations for both physical and digital interpretation
- Visitor experience walkthrough – A conceptual 2D/3D layout of interpretive elements.
- Integration with site design – How interpretation aligns with RIBA3 architectural work to create a cohesive, engaging visitor experience
- Explain the best forms of media to deliver the aims and objectives of the interpretation in order to bring the Burns family's time at Ellisland to life for our visitors
- How Scots language will be used in the interpretation
- Digital interpretation approaches
- Visitor testing requirements – Formative and evaluative audience engagement.
- Indicative costings – To inform the Delivery Stage Heritage Fund application.
- Some audience consultation including research into existing and potential audiences and those who do not visit the site at present - building on past work.

The interpretation plan consultant/s will work with key stakeholders, the trust and its volunteers as well as the other teams involved in the Development Stage of the project.

We wish to commission an Interpretation Plan which gives structure to the project with clear aims, objectives and methods. We'll use the Interpretation Plan, alongside other documents (Conservation Management Plan and Activity Plans, Project Business Plan and RIBA3 designs) to support a Delivery Phase Heritage Fund application as well as other fundraising. The work will be essential for project planning our Delivery Phase and for benchmarking during project evaluation.

The Interpretation Plan will also build on the Trust's 2023 document: "Ellisland: FutureVision". This was a master planning exercise involving architects, business planners, community engagement, culture and heritage professionals which produced a project business plan and architects designs to RIBA2 (for a link to this document, see Background Documents). This document was updated ahead of our application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. **In particular, our architectural plans no longer include a new build visitor centre and we intend to deliver our vision by adapting the historic buildings.** We include the updated RIBA2 Architectural Plan in Background Documents. We still require visitor accommodation to raise income and deliver cultural residencies and retreats. **Our business plan will be refreshed to reflect these changes.** We are currently appointing a new conservation architect led design team to take the plans forward to RIBA3.

Interaction with RIBA3 & RIBA4

The IP will guide RIBA Stage 3 (Developed Design) and inform the subsequent RIBA Stage 4 (Technical Design & Procurement). While RIBA4 design consultants will be appointed later, the IP must:

- Define interpretation needs to be incorporated into RIBA4 technical designs.
- Provide a costed framework for interpretation elements.
- Align with the RIBA3 design team on visitor experience and spatial integration.

As well as the plan itself, we require design services to take the project to RIBA 4 which will include scheme design (RIBA3).

Scheme design (RIBA stage 3):

- With the design team, develop and refine the visitor experience. Create a walk-through, describing exhibits, techniques and treatments with design visuals and text.
- Review the 3D design against the interpretation plan and check for synergy.
- With the 2D designer and interpretation consultant, agree the text hierarchy and word counts.
- Compile sample text for 2D concept designs including, where relevant, bilingual text.
- Appoint a consultant to undertake an access audit of your scheme design and make revisions where necessary.
- Commence community participation projects and agree how outputs will be incorporated into the 3D design.

- Test scheme design with target audiences and make any revisions needed.
- Review scheme design against the budget and undertake value engineering with the design team if required.

1. Methodology and approach

In tendering, please specify the methodology and approach you would take to deliver the work. The following principles and values are important to RBET:

- Research-based decision making
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Originality and encouraging creativity in visitors
- Cognisance of significance and relevance and the need to conserve this
- Value for money
- Environmental sustainability
- Engaging with and supporting Ellisland's natural surroundings

2. Outputs/deliverables

The main outputs within scope are:

No.	Output	When required
1	Heritage Interpretation Plan (two drafts to be shared with RBET before final draft agreed)	November 2025
2	Walk through (2D and 3D visuals)	November 2025
3	Sample text	September 2025
4	Access audit of designs	November 2025
5	Tested and costed scheme design	November 2025

Given that this work is a key part of a wider project there are consequences for a failure to meet deliverable dates so we will be asking for evidence of ability to work to deadlines.

Evidence of previous experience of working on similar projects, relevant qualifications, and two referee testimonies are required as part of the tender assessment.

3. Contract management

The work is offered as a fixed-term contract. There is a fixed fee of **£25,000 excluding VAT**.

The successful tenderer will be self-employed and responsible for their own tax and personal insurance. Evidence of professional indemnity insurance will be required.

Payments will be made as follows:

30% on receipt and acceptance of output 1, a further 40% on completion of outputs 2-4, and the remainder upon acceptance of output 5.

4. Award criteria

Submissions will be evaluated on a quality / price basis (70:30) and will include the following:

- i. Understanding of the brief (20 points)
- ii. Methodology and approach (30 points)
- iii. Skills and experience of the team, including two referee testimonials (20 points)
- iv. Price (30 points)

The preferred method of response to the project brief is for consultants to submit a proposal by email to the key project contact above by Friday 25 April 2025. The Trust may ask you to attend an online meeting to provide details of the service you are proposing.

The proposals should include:

- Name, contact details and background of the lead consultant.
- Your approach to delivering the outputs specified.
- Breakdown of costs for conducting this study, including number of days allocated per task, all fees, expenses, charges, meetings, presentations and interviews, including VAT.
- A timetable showing the various milestones including the anticipated dates of submission of draft and final reports, and other outputs.
- Examples of similar tasks / studies undertaken recently.
- Details of subcontractors required and associated hours/costs.
- Background information on your company, as well as details of staff allocated to the project, together with experience of the contractor and staff members in carrying out similar projects. The project manager/lead contact should be identified.

The information gathered during the commission, including draft and final reports, shall remain the sole property of The Robert Burns Ellisland Trust.

5. Procurement timetable

Activity	Date
Proposal return deadline	25 April 2025
Notification of procurement decision	16 May 2025
Interviews with shortlisted suppliers (in person)	TBC
Project start date	01 June 2025

Proposals should be sent by email and addressed to Joan McAlpine, Project Director, at ellislandbusinessmanager@gmail.com

6. Background information

Background information can be found on our website:

<https://www.ellislandfarm.co.uk/background-for-interpretation-plan/>