

## What do you want to say and why?

The third in a series of Interpret Scotland guides to interpretation. Mary Hudson looks at interpretive planning.

Planning interpretation means thinking carefully about what you want to tell people and why. It also leads you to ask a whole range of questions about who your visitors are, what is significant about your place and why you feel it is important to interpret it. Asking these questions before a project starts helps to focus the interpretation and means you will be able to measure its success.

Interpretive Plans can vary in length and format depending upon the nature of the site and the objective of the plan. Asking yourself why the plan is necessary will help to determine what format the plan should take. Is it required as part of a funding application? Is it a chance to get all the people involved with a particular site or project together and record their thoughts and ideas? Or is it simply a way of focussing the interpretation – making sure the aims, objectives and storylines are identified and adhered to?

### Writing interpretive plans

There are a number of books and guidelines (see below) that provide detailed advice on how to write an interpretive plan. In the meantime, the following list may help to get you started.

1. **Interpretive aims and objectives**  
Why do you want to communicate with visitors? (increasing understanding/managing visitors/managing a site/improving the economy etc.)
2. **Who are your visitors?** (characteristics/numbers/interests and expectations/length of stay) See Issue 13 for more detailed guidelines.
3. **What is your place like and what does it have to offer?** (features visitors can see/unique stories the place has to tell/what is significant)
4. **What else is happening around?** (both within and without the site – what already exists in local area/what is already interpreted within the site)
5. **What do you want to say about your place?** Identify themes.
6. **How, and where, you are going to say it?** (choice of media/location and timing of media/allocation of different themes to different places)
7. **Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate!** See Issue 14 for more detailed guidelines.

## What do you want to say?

One of the most important steps in interpretive planning is to decide upon a theme – or what you want your interpretation to say. Ideally, a theme should take the form of a complete sentence, or sentences, and should represent the main thing, or things, that the visitor should have learnt before leaving the place. A number of themes may be identified to allow for a number of subjects to be covered but it is important not to have too many so your visitors don't get overloaded!

It is always helpful to ask yourself:

- What do I want people to know as a result of the interpretation?
- What do I want people to feel as a result of the interpretation?
- What do I want people to do as a result of the interpretation?

These questions should help you develop sound interpretive themes.

For more on interpretive planning, try these resources:

SNH guidelines on interpretive planning

[www.snh.org.uk/www/Interpretation/default.html](http://www.snh.org.uk/www/Interpretation/default.html)

SMC factsheet and guidance on how to write an interpretive plan

[www.scottishmuseums.org.uk](http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk)

A sense of place – an interpretive planning handbook, ed. James Carter (1997)

Available for download from the Scottish Interpretation Network (SIN) website

[www.scotinterpnet.org.uk](http://www.scotinterpnet.org.uk)

Interpretive planning: the 5-M model for successful planning projects Lisa Brochu (2003) InterpPress, Fort Collins, Colorado

Environmental interpretation: a practical guide for people with big ideas and small budgets Sam Ham (1992) North America Press ISBN 1 555919022

Interpretive master planning John Veverka (1994) Falcon Press ISBN 1560442743