

Issued by Eden Court Theatre.

**PRESS RELEASE AND PRESS CONFERENCE CALL:
EMBARGOED UNTIL THURSDAY 5 AUGUST 2:00pm**

CURTAIN UP ON PLANS FOR THE NEW EDEN COURT

The redevelopment of Eden Court reached an important milestone this week with the submission of a planning application to the Highland Council. Approval of this application would clear the way to proceed with the construction of their ambitious capital development project.

The plans include the construction of a second theatre, two new state-of-the-art cinemas and two studios for education use. The historic Bishop's Palace will be renovated to provide meeting rooms and improved office accommodation. A new dressing room block will also be built along with major improvements to all public areas including toilets, bars, restaurant and box office.

This will enable Eden Court to increase all areas of its work – live events, cinema and education. Importantly for the region this development will also lead to an increase in the conferences accommodated within the venue.

Construction will begin in early June 2005 and is due to be completed at the end of 2006 in time for Eden Court, as the only large-scale venue in the Highlands, to play a vital role celebrating the 2007 Scottish Year of Highland Culture.

Over the last six months Eden Court's architects, Page and Park, have been designing and creating the exciting plans for the new Eden Court. The scale and importance of the building has led the design team to consider innovative solutions and in particular the approach to ventilation which will make the new Eden Court unique in Scotland.

The cost of the construction of the project, including the repair and renewal of the existing Eden Court building is estimated to be in the region of £13 million. With associated costs and fees the total project value is likely to be in the region of £15 million.

The new Eden Court will have buildings from three different eras – the 1870's, 1970s and 2006. Detailed costs now take account of the complexity of working with two very different existing buildings. These costs also include repairing the structural defects in the external walls of the 1976 building and the increase in requirements for circulation space and fire safety which have recently come into force.

Eden Court and the design team believe they have plans which meet all the theatre's requirements for the 21st century in the most cost effective way possible.

Funding for this important and exciting project is being sought from a number of public sector bodies and decisions are expected before the end of 2004. The funding package will be completed by the Eden Court Appeal which is seeking to raise £2million from individuals, businesses and trusts.

Speaking on behalf of Eden Court, Director Colin Marr said,

"The development of Eden Court has been discussed throughout my time as Director. The continued growth in our audiences and education activities have allowed us to reach this point and it is great moment to able to present these plans. The development will allow us to fulfil our potential and to serve our audience in the way that they deserve."

Chair of Eden Court, Douglas Yule said:

"The Board of Governors of Eden Court and the staff working on this project understand the huge responsibility they have collectively undertaken. This project, when complete, will enrich the lives of our citizens, stimulate our economy, and enhance the creative reputation of the Highlands. It is the most significant arts project to be undertaken in Scotland over the next three years"

Capital Development Manager Donna Chisholm added,

"This is a tremendous opportunity for Inverness and the Highlands to create an arts centre to be proud of for another 30 years. Eden Court is an important part of the lives of thousands of people, and the time is right to invest in the future."

The Highland Council has confirmed its strong support for the development of the area's premier arts and cultural centre at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness.

Council Convener Alison Magee said

"We look forward to an improved venue of true national as well as local significance. The Year of Highland Culture in 2007 will be a great opportunity for us to showcase the best of Highland Culture and a new Eden Court facility will be central to a successful celebration.

"The Council is working closely with Eden Court on this development which we see as one of the most significant in Highland, and in Cultural and Arts terms, in Scotland."

Already the Council has pledged a contribution of £600,000 from its Education Culture and Sport budget and £900,000 from the Inverness Common Good Fund.

Provost William Smith, Vice Chair of Eden Court Board of Governors said

These exciting improvements are designed to service the resident of the Highlands and to attract more visitors and conferences from all over the world. The commitment from Inverness Common Good Fund is a true indication of the important part Eden Court plays in the life of the city."

As owners of the theatre, the Council has also allocated £750,000 to be spent on known, ongoing repairs to the existing theatre building.

Inverness and Nairn Enterprise Chief Executive Stuart Black said:

"Inverness city and the wider Highlands need a major 21st century arts venue to capitalise on the area's growing economic and cultural status. INE has already backed this project with marketing and feasibility support and I commend Eden Court for their ambition and vision in developing this creative hub for the region."

Planning permission is being sought at this stage as it is a condition for some of the funding partners. The tender for construction of the new Eden Court will not be concluded until the funding package is complete and it is anticipated that a main contractor will be appointed in April 2005

It is anticipated that Eden Court will be closed from early June 2005 until December 2006. Eden Court is currently working on plans that will allow it to continue a cultural cinema programme in a different venue, along with a limited programme of live events in both Inverness and the wider Highlands.

03 August 04

Note to Editors:

You are invited to send a Reporter/Photographer to Eden Court on Thursday 05 August at 2.00pm for the first public opportunity to view the plans and designs for the new Eden Court.

Architect David Page will be present to answer questions on the plans.

There will be an opportunity to interview Colin Marr, Director of Eden Court, Donna Chisholm, Capital Project Manager, Douglas Yule, Chair of the Board of Governors and David Page of Page and Park Architects and creator of the new plans.

If you would like any further information contact Victoria Stuart in the first instance on 01463 239841 or vstuart@eden-court.co.uk

Additional notes and background information:

- ✚ Eden Court present a year-round theatre programme attracting performers and companies from all over the United Kingdom, Europe and the USA.
- ✚ As well as presenting a year-round theatre programme the venue also has a thriving cultural cinema with the 'hardest working seats in the country'.
- ✚ The Eden Court Outreach and Education Programme is the best in the Scotland. Last year there were over 90,000 attendances by children at Outreach events across the Highlands
- ✚ Eden Court is the only theatre in Scotland to offer qualifications in SQA Higher Drama and Higher Dance Practice. Currently there are no suitable rooms available in the building and lessons take place in a public foyer.
- ✚ A recent survey estimated that Eden Court contributes £3.5 million to the Highland economy which will increase to £5.9 million after the capital project.
- ✚ A recent investment appraisal (carried out by TENON Scotland) showed that upgrading on the current site was the lowest cost option for providing the facilities

that will be housed within the New Eden Court. The appraisal also demonstrated that without investment Eden Court only had a short number of years left as a viable business concern.

- ✚ Eden Court attracts large numbers of visitors. Last year the pantomime attracted an audience of 36,000, the largest single event in the Highlands.
- ✚ For such a large scale and high profile project it is intended that a European-wide procurement procedure will be followed to appoint the construction company to build a new Eden Court.