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## NEW ARENA FOR NESS ISLANDS



The Ness Islands enhancement programme gets under way this week when environmental artist, Keith Barrett, begins work on creating a new 'arena' in the central open space on the site of the old bandstand and roller-skating rink. A series of low, curving earth banks will be faced in local stone and have inbuilt wooden seating. This will provide seating in the sunniest spot on the island, and the curving forms will be ideal for

children's play as well as outdoor group events such as those run by The Highland Council's rangers, and occasional performances arranged by the Arts Officer or local groups.

Keith is committed to producing designs in close consultation with people most affected by the work. For this project the children joined him on the Islands and identified things that are important to them about the area. These will be turned into drawings and 2D reliefs which will be cast in iron and incorporated into his final work. Site preparation and construction will begin in April.

Keith said: "I am particularly interested in working in a landscape context, and even more so in association with water. A persistent theme in my work has been an exploration of the relationship between people and their landscape at the point it meets the water's edge. The Ness Islands provides an ideal setting to represent this sort of theme. I hope people will enjoy using the space either as a meeting and social space or for quiet reflection."

Keith's skills are ideally suited to this commission, since they include large scale timber carving and construction, stone work and earthwork construction. Inverness City Partnership Officer Marie Mackintosh said that Keith will be on site from April until early July. She said: "This is a substantial work and the central area will be fenced off for safety reasons while it progresses. However, it will be clearly visible to the public and we hope locals will enjoy seeing the creation take shape as they walk past it. Next year it will be the venue for an exciting community performance planned as part of Highland 2007."

The arena forms part of a wider enhancement strategy for the Ness Islands. Tree management works are due to get underway from Monday (27 March) and two further artists have been commissioned to produce new entrance interpretation features and benches. Other improvements to lighting and the provision of bins are also planned. The cost of the overall package of works is estimated at £250,000 and funding contributions have been confirmed from Inverness City Partnership, Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Enterprise, Highland 2007, and Inverness

City Heritage Trust. An application will shortly be lodged with Scottish Natural Heritage.

**Ends**

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