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High level masonry inspections to start at historic East Lothian heritage sites

Inspections will be underway at Tantallon Castle and Dirleton Castle this month

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has announced today (Friday 20 January) that high level masonry inspections will start at Tantallon Castle and Dirleton Castle on Monday 23 January.

The inspections can take over a month due to the scope of the task and the different characteristics of the buildings, many of which date back several hundred years, and were constructed according to the conventions and materials of the time. It is estimated that the tactile inspection at Tantallon Castle will take 45 working days due to the size of the site and the hands-on nature of the work.

Access restrictions were put in place at the sites last year as a safety precaution while HES, who manages the sites, introduced new measures to manage the impact of climate change on its heritage assets, an issue which is affecting heritage owners globally.

The High Level Masonry Programme, which is the result of ongoing risk assessment and sample surveys is assessing the impact of climate change on historic sites at a high level, in combination with a number of other factors, including the materials used in the building's construction, its age and physical location. Whilst this is not an issue unique to Scotland, HES is believed to be amongst the first heritage managers to approach it in this way, with the results shared with peer organisations.

Work is taking place at a number of sites across Scotland and HES has completed detailed, tactile inspections at 25 sites across the country since May, with a further 13 due for completion by Spring 2023, with work continuing to take place over the winter months.

While necessary access restrictions have been put in place at sites while the programme is ongoing, access has been maintained where possible to other areas, with the gardens, exhibition and shop currently open at Dirleton and the castle grounds and shop open at Tantallon.

Craig Mearns, Director of Operations at HES, said: "Tantallon and Dirleton castles are both hugely significant heritage sites and I am delighted to announce that inspections will begin this month. We are working as quickly as we can to roll out our nationwide programme of inspections, and we appreciate the public's patience while we undertake this necessary work.

"Once the inspections have been carried out, the results will be analysed to inform any interventions or repairs that will be required in order to provide additional visitor access."