

**The Highland Council**  
**Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee**

**2 November 2016**

**Town and Countryside Capital Programme**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

Agenda Item	<b>6</b>
Report No	<b>PDI/ 59/16</b>

**Summary**

This report provides an update on capital allocations within the Town & Countryside Capital Programme to 2024/25. These projects are recommended in support of the Council's 'Highland First' priorities including, in particular, projects with the potential for new ways of working with communities. The programme supports Highland First and the Service commitment to improve the benefits derived by communities from our countryside assets and facilities.

Members are invited to note the contents of the report and agree the proposed project allocations.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Highland Council's Capital Programme was presented to Full Council on 17 December 2015 resulting in approval of a programme to 2024/25, future years being dependant on the outcome of future Government spending reviews.
- 1.2 The Town and Countryside (T&C) programme is that part of the Council's Capital Programme formerly delivered by the Planning & Development Service and now integrated within the Development & Infrastructure Service programme. The T&C Programme is delivered by the Projects & Facilities (P&F) Team based at Headquarters in Inverness.
- 1.3 The T&C programme for the next nine years is £6.7 million.

**2 Reporting Process**

- 2.1 This annual report provides Planning, Development and Infrastructure (PDI) Committee Members with an overview of progress with project delivery over the past twelve months and the opportunity to agree the allocation of resources in future years. This is the second Town & Countryside annual report to be submitted to PDI Committee.
- 2.2 Projects are grouped into four generic headings under which they are reported within the corporate capital monitoring statement by the Development and Infrastructure Finance Manager: Town & Countryside Regeneration; Visitor Management; Misc. Assets, Bridges & Structures; Green Networks, Core Paths & Long Distance Routes.

### 3 Current Context

3.1 Capital allocation within the T&C programme has generally been directed for investment in six project types, which have been agreed by successive administrations since 2011:

- upgrade of assets within D&I Service portfolio of countryside sites;
- quality public space enhancements;
- access to and within the countryside;
- sense of place projects - reinforcing special local character;
- town and village entrance environments and gateway features; and
- interpretation and visitor signage

3.2 The ongoing relevance of project types will be reviewed to reflect any changes in Council priorities over time and appropriate recommendations for change or adaptation will be brought to Committee.

### 4 Programme for the Administration - Highland First – Priorities

4.1 The project types and specific allocations are recommended as being of continuing importance and ongoing relevance in support of the priorities identified within Highland First. In particular, projects have strong potential to deliver against the following priority areas:

- Realising the full potential of communities – involving and empowering communities in new and better ways including opportunities for partnership working and community land ownership;
- Delivering positive rural impacts including investment in remote locations;
- Enhancing town and village environments and contributing to development of the character and quality of the City environment;
- Enabling best use of opportunities for European and other external funding;
- Supporting the economic benefits derived from tourism through improvements in visitor experience and developing Highland as a world class destination;
- Contributing to delivery of the Gaelic Language Plan - working in partnership with communities and through the provision of information to visitors; and
- Contributing to health improvements through promotion of access to both countryside and urban networks.

### 5 Progress Report and Key Changes

5.1 Actual expenditure during the last financial year [2015/16] was £1.06 million. Budget for 2016/17 is 1.846 million including budget carried forward as slippage from 2015/16. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of these figures against projects and a summary of current and proposed capital allocations to projects within the T&C programme to 2024/25.

- 5.2 There have been some adjustments to the scheduling of projects and budget allocations to best reflect the reduction of £425k within the corporate programme, and the actual scope and progress to date with specific projects. Key developments are provided below. **Appendix 2** provides further information regarding all projects.

## **6 Storr Woodland, Staffin**

- 6.1 Works are ongoing to secure the establishment of new native woodland on the approach to the Old Man of Storr. The popularity of this site continues to grow with approximately one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) visitors in 2016. The site is of very great significance to tourism and economic development in this relatively remote area of Highland. Designs are in preparation for significantly enhanced parking capacity in order to alleviate traffic congestion.
- 6.2 The P&F team continues to work very closely with the Staffin Community Trust in developing proposals for greater community involvement, which interest has been separately reported to the Asset Management Project Board (19 April 2016). The shared vision is that innovative partnership working between the Council and the Trust will enable both to deliver more than either could achieve alone. This will enable the community to utilise the Council's capital allocation for parking improvements as match funding to secure additional external investment for the provision of much needed toilet facilities and other visitor management improvements. In addition it will create local employment and contribute to sustainable community development. The Trust is expected to be in a position to confirm detailed community aspirations to the Council by December 2016.
- 6.3 This project supports the Council's Priorities outlined in paragraph four above. It also makes a significant contribution to improvements in the quality of visitor experience and related issues at a time when these are under immense pressure from increasing visitor numbers, particularly on Skye.

## **7 Strathpeffer Spa Gardens**

- 7.1 Budget allocation increased by £59k to reflect tender prices received. The first two phases of upgrade are now complete.
- 7.2 It is intended to develop a third phase project for the upgrade of the car park area, which currently is a valuable civic space but with poor layout and in poor repair. The vision is that phase three improvements will be in partnership with an appropriate community group to enable wider community aspirations to be achieved. P&FT are in liaison with Ward Members regarding next steps in establishing a suitable community led delivery mechanism. This project will, in particular, support the delivery of the Council's priorities for realising the full potential of communities, enhancing town and village environments and making Highland an attractive place.

## **8 Town & Countryside Regeneration Community Initiatives**

- 8.1 Longer term the programme includes a generic allowance for T&CR Community Initiatives - a stimulant for the development of new ways of working with communities and, in particular, intending to prioritise opportunities for communities to take a greater or lead role in the management of assets and facilities.
- 8.2 Firm commitment has been given for £100k in support of Ardgay village enhancements being delivered in partnership with Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.
- 8.3 This generic allocation may also enable communities affected by escalating visitor management problems in the vicinity of the Fairy Pools (Glen Brittle) to develop a community led solution and discussions are underway with local stakeholders including Ward Members.
- 8.4 Overall this capital allocation has the potential to make a significant contribution to the Council's priorities for involving and empowering communities and supporting communities to do things for themselves.

## **9 Chanonry Point (Fortrose)**

- 9.1 Budget allocation is reduced by £70k to reflect tender prices received and works on site are complete.
- 9.2 Delivery has been underpinned by successful community engagement, and this major upgrade is a lasting legacy of a successful collaboration between diverse community stakeholders. Chanonry Point attracts over one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) visitors per annum and there are further community aspirations for the future and appetite for continued partnership working.

## **10 Smoo Cave, Durness**

- 10.1 Works complete.
- 10.2 Smoo Cave now attracts nearly 70,000 visitors per annum, and is a major visitor attraction in a relatively remote location. Situated within the North West Highlands Geopark and on the increasingly popular North Coast 500 route, visitor numbers are expected to continue to increase.
- 10.3 The P&F team are in liaison with Ward Members to facilitate consideration of options for Council partnership working with the Durness community, and to enable greater community involvement and local benefit from the potential for further commercial developments.

## **11 Wester Ross**

- 11.1 Community consultation identified the need for strategically located visitor information shelters. Building upon the recent Scottish Scenic Routes pilot initiative and in recognition of 2016 as the Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design, designs will be procured through a competition process. This process

invites architects to submit innovative design proposals and the selection process will include both a technical panel and a panel of community representatives. The winning design will be implemented on the ground.

- 11.2 This project will test a different approach to procurement, whilst also providing an opportunity for emerging professionals to showcase their work. It also supports the Council's priorities for positive rural impacts, delivering economic benefits from tourism through improvements in visitor experience and developing Highland as a world class destination. The shelters will be located on sites which complement the North Coast 500 route and the Wester Ross Biosphere Reserve.

## **12 Bighouse Bridge, Melvich**

- 12.1 Designs are complete and this footbridge upgrade is scheduled for implementation in 2017. Affordability is uncertain pending the outcome of invitations to tender.

## **13 Ballachulish Inclined Plane**

- 13.1 Working in partnership with the Community Council, this project was able to access significant funding from Heritage Lottery and Historic Environment Scotland. The project included not only the stabilisation of this valued local Scheduled structure, but also upgrades for all abilities access and visitor interpretation, an oral history project, and improved community website through which this information is accessible to all.
- 13.2 In particular, the project has supported the Council's priorities for partnership working, enabling best use of opportunities for external funding, contributing to delivery of the Gaelic Language Plan; working in partnership with communities and through the provision of information to visitors; and contributing to health improvements through promotion of access to the countryside. It provides a lasting legacy: both in the Scheduled structure and in the oral history project, which was featured on Radio Alba for its relevance to the Gaelic language. Visitor interpretation provided on site and throughout the village contributes to Highland's cultural facilities. Local participation has involved not only partnership working and oral history project, but also two well attended slate skills workshops.
- 13.3 The P&F team continue to work closely with this active local community and has initiated a dialogue to ascertain whether there exists an appetite for community ownership.

## **14 Glen Nevis Bridge, Fort William**

- 14.1 Budget allocation increased by £138k to reflect additional scope and tender prices received. Contract awarded for completion on site during the current financial year.
- 14.2 The footbridge provides access from the Nevis Visitor Centre to riverside paths and beyond to Ben Nevis. It comprises one element within a package of wider access improvements, including all abilities access, which is being delivered through the Nevis Landscape Partnership. The centre receives approximately

60,000 visitors per annum, with access to the countryside for sport and recreation in this area making a major contribution to the local, Highland and national economy.

## **15 Coghill Bridge, Wick**

15.1 Designs are near complete for this major upgrade and an application for planning consent will be submitted late 2016, with works scheduled to be on site March to September 2017. Affordability is uncertain pending the outcome of invitations to tender.

15.2 Coghill Bridge is a key piece of infrastructure connecting popular outdoor civic amenity sites and facilitating outdoor recreation and access to the countryside.

## **16 Soldiers Bridge, Fort William**

16.1 The P&F team is delivering partial refurbishment of the Soldiers Bridge, near Fort William, at a cost in the region of £285k. All costs are to be reimbursed to the Council by Sustrans and the refurbished structure is to be adopted by Community Services for ongoing management and maintenance.

## **17 Summary**

17.1 Committee is asked to review the overall programme as provided in **Appendix 1** and further described in **Appendix 2** and to agree the recommended project allocations to 2024/25, subject to ongoing affordability within the Corporate Capital Programme. Some projects are already established and underway based upon approval by committee.

17.2 There is constant need to adapt the detail of capital allocations for a variety of reasons: to manage project over / underspends; to allow flexibility to take advantage of short term opportunities such as external funding; and to enable timely essential works to take place where safety is a consideration. Experience has shown that a rigid application of a fixed capital allocation to a particular project, made in advance of detailed project design or external income opportunities, is not always appropriate to the nature of the projects undertaken. Some flexibility within the programme allows the team to be responsive to such circumstances, whilst still delivering timely capital expenditure. Committee has previously agreed that essential adjustments to allocations can be authorised by the Director and Finance Manager and reported on an annual basis.

## **18 Implications**

18.1 **Resources:** Projects are funded from the Highland Council Capital Programme with external funding secured in addition whenever possible. The scope of projects is tailored to the funds available and therefore there are no additional resource implications for the Council. The greatest risk is that of abortive projects when tenders come in significantly in excess of cost estimates, particularly when this relates to construction cost estimates for significant pieces of infrastructure such as bridges.

- 18.2 **Legal, Equality, Risk and Rural:** Potential legal, equality, risk and rural impacts vary due to the wide range of projects undertaken and are considered on a project specific basis as an integral part of the project planning process.
- 18.3 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** Opportunities and constraints are considered as an integral part of the project planning process.
- 18.4 **Gaelic:** Opportunities for the inclusion of Gaelic are considered as an integral part of the project planning process.

### **Recommendation**

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and agree the proposed project allocations, subject to ongoing affordability within the Corporate Capital programme.

Designation: Director of Development & Infrastructure  
Date: 07 October 2016  
Author: Ann Hackett, Principal Projects Officer  
Background Papers: Appendix 1: Town & Countryside Capital Programme: 2016/17 to 2024/25.  
Appendix 2: Town & Countryside Capital Programme: Project Descriptions.

**APPENDIX 1 (2016)**
**Development & Infrastructure Service**
**Capital Programme: Town & Countryside 2016/17 to 2024/25**

	ACTUAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
PROJECT	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/5
<b>Town &amp; Countryside Regeneration</b>										
Inverness Castle North Tower	189	0								
Dell of Spey Aviemore	2	60								
Inverness Townscape Heritage		125	175	250						
Storr Native Woodland	-4	75	20		10					
Kyle Steps		30								
Strathpeffer Spa Gardens	53	136			125	125				
Approaching Inverness	10	15	15	130						
Nairn		100								
Small Scale Facilities Upgrades							100	100	100	100
T&CR Community Initiatives			50	50			200	200	250	75
Community Woodland Upgrades								150	50	
Other T&CR Projects									125	50
<b>Visitor Management</b>										
Aviemore Orbital	1	50								
Chanonry Point	291	64								
Glen Nevis Visitor Centre		35								
Mallaig Decking	70									
Dunnet Head & Dunnet Beach	65	75								
Plock of Kyle	5	10								
Smoo Cave Durness	24									
Dubh Lochan Trail	10									
Pictish Trail					10	20				
Wester Ross Visitor Hubs		10	150		75	75				
Reiss Beach Access Upgrade		50								
Storr Visitor Management Staffin				170	230					
Strathnaver Trail						10				
Foyers Viewpoint						95	75			
North Kessock Viewpoint						125	50			
Highland Scenic Routes						25	100	100		
Cairngorm National Park						25	25			
Other Visitor Management Projects			15						50	50
<b>Misc Assets Bridges &amp; Structures</b>										
Bighouse Bridge Upgrade	48	141								
Ballachulish Inclined Plane	162	-15								
Glen Nevis Footbridge	29	259								
Coghill Footbridge Wick	20	485								
Packhorse Bridge Carrbridge						50				
Old Spey Bridge Grantown on Spey						50				
Other Misc Assets Bridges & Structures									200	
<b>Green Networks, Core Paths &amp; Long Distance Routes</b>										
Green Infrastructure			175		150					
Ardsiersier Path	1	51								
Long Distance Routes	85	90					50	50	100	
Other GN CP LDR Projects									50	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,061</b>	<b>1846</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>325</b>



## **APPENDIX 2 (Update 2016)**

### **TOWN & COUNTRYSIDE CAPITAL PROGRAMME: PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS.**

#### **Inverness Castle North Tower £200k**

Budget remaining (£111k) vired to City Deal.

#### **Dell of Spey Aviemore £62k**

Designs in preparation (cross service with CS Street Lighting) for completion during the current financial year.

This popular site and water feature, in the heart of Aviemore, sits within the portfolio of countryside facilities. Designs are in preparation for essential upgrade of lighting and resurfacing, which works are essential for safe operation of the site.

#### **Inverness Townscape Heritage £550k**

The Townscape Heritage Project entered the delivery phase late in 2015 and will run for a period of 5 years. Annual reports will be provided to both PDI Committee and the City of Inverness Area Committee.

#### **Approaching Inverness £170k**

Detailed designs in preparation for delivery 2018/19.

This project aims to improve the quality, character and impact of entrances to and routes through the City of Inverness. Three demonstration projects, capable of replication elsewhere in the City, have been agreed by City of Inverness Area Committee (ICC) to include:

1. City gateway structure at Clachnaharry.
2. A82 Telford Roundabout improvements, in partnership with Transport Scotland.
3. A82 Longman central reservation improvements, in partnership with Transport Scotland.

This project has also delivered a strategic design guide which has been approved by ICC for adoption as non-statutory supplementary guidance.

#### **Nairn £100k**

Liaison with Ward Members regarding a suitable scope of works has, to date, proved inconclusive, but dialogue is continuing. There is a strong expectation that capital will be spent for regeneration works on or in close association with the High Street.

#### **Small Scale Facilities Upgrades £400k**

The Service manages a portfolio of in excess of 200 countryside sites including woodlands, car parks, picnic sites, paths, bridges and structures and over five hundred other minor structures and installations including signage, interpretation panels and seating. These sites are owned or leased by Highland Council and £400k has been allocated in future years in anticipation of essential upgrades across the portfolio. A number of these sites are significant importance to the Highland tourism

product, valued by both visitors and locals and making a major contribution to the economic vitality of their communities and Highland. Some are of local importance and highly valued by communities for recreation and access to the countryside. Many provide some element of all-abilities access to the countryside.

The management of these facilities supports a wide range of Council priorities, in particular investing in remote rural locations; supporting the economic benefits derived from tourism; increasing awareness of the Gaelic language (through appropriate use on information and interpretation facilities); and contributing to health improvements through access to the countryside, outdoor sport and recreation; supporting the Council's equalities duties through provision of all-abilities access to countryside facilities and interpretation information; and pro-actively supporting communities to develop their appetites for asset transfer.

It is anticipated that upgrades may be required at Lybster Park, Kingsteps Quarry (Nairn), Glen Nevis Visitor Centre Car Park, Durness East Car Park, Longman Bird Hide (Inverness) and Noss Head (Wick), within the period of the programme, but this generic allocation allows flexibility and will enable a responsive approach to developing situations.

### **Town & Countryside Regeneration Community Initiatives £825k**

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

In addition to Storr Woodland and Strathpeffer Spa Gardens, which projects have been specifically described elsewhere in this Appendix, we are already aware of a number of other community initiatives which could develop into candidate projects of this type, for example: Clachtoll Visitor Centre (Coigach Assynt Living Landscape Partnership), Muir of Ord Village Enhancements (Muir of Ord Community Hall & Facilities Company) and Fairy Pools Visitor Management (Minginish Community Hall Association).

In recognition of the importance of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the developing agenda for increased 'localism', £825k has been allocated to a generic heading Town & Countryside Regeneration Community Initiatives. This allocation is intended to enable the Service to develop new ways of working in partnership with communities for the delivery of projects for which there is a strong drive from within the community, coupled with evidence of both widespread community support and community capacity to deliver.

It is expected that the scope of such projects will fit within the six project types identified for the T&CR Capital Programme and that this capital can also be targeted in support of community initiatives to 'adopt' and deliver community ownership or management of sites within the Service portfolio of countryside facilities. There may be opportunities for participatory budgeting which will need to be considered on a project specific basis. Projects will be identified through close liaison with Ward Members and it is expected that suitable projects will be identified some years in advance of the years in which allocations have been included in the programme in recognition of likely long project development phases.

Projects delivered under this heading will have considerable potential to support the Council's priorities for realising the full potential of communities, empowering communities in new and better ways and including opportunities for partnership working and community land ownership. It is also very likely that the provision of Council funding for such projects will support the Council's priorities in enabling best use of opportunities for European and other external funding.

This generic heading offers the potential for an exciting new approach and development of different models for delivery of capital investment, supporting communities to do things for themselves.

### **Community Woodland Upgrades £200k**

This investment will contribute to Council priorities in a manner as described for Small Scale Facilities Upgrades above.

In addition to Storr Woodland and Strathpeffer Spa Gardens, which are described under separate headings, the Service manages a range of Community Woodland sites which are owned by Highland Council: Ellan Wood (Carrbridge), Loch Imrich (Newtonmore), Ralia Woodland (Kingussie), Feshiebridge Woodland, Tradespark Woodland (Nairn), Mill Pond and Leasgeary Woods (both Portree), Strontian Woodland, Daviot Woodland, Culloden Drive, Smithton Wood, and Foyers Wood. These are popular sites, in most cases for both locals and visitors and £200k has been allocated in future years to this generic heading intended to allow appropriate upgrades to woodland infrastructure including paths, information and interpretation infrastructure.

Projects & Facilities Team will explore the need for improved management at Council owned woodland sites currently outwith the D&I portfolio and will explore options for these sites to be upgraded for public access and other wider benefits.

### **Other Town & Countryside Regeneration Projects £175k**

An allowance of £175k has been allocated to this generic heading in the last year of the programme in order to allow the Service to respond to developing demand for T&CR projects within the context of the six project types to which this programme is targeted.

### **Aviemore Orbital £51k**

This is an important Core Path, popular with locals, and with a section forming part of the Speyside Way. The Council will seek to work in partnership with the community for the delivery of improvements to both the Orbital and in support of other community path network projects.

### **Chanonry Point (Fortrose) £355k**

Works have been completed during the current financial year.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

Building upon substantial community consultation since 2010, this project has upgraded the car park facility and created an improved visitor experience through the introduction of improved surfaces, improved vehicular circulation, disabled bays,

seating, and a clear pedestrian route to the dolphin viewing area. There are timber sleeper edging features and an area with visitor information/ interpretation panels to encourage visitors to stay longer in the area.

Chanonry Point has become a very popular site for dolphin watching, attracting around 150 thousand visitors each year and making it one of the 10 most visited attractions in Highland.

### **Glen Nevis Visitor Centre (Fort William) £35k**

This project will be delivered by High Life Highland and is expected to complete during the current financial year.

Glen Nevis Visitor Centre is owned by Highland Council but managed by High Life Highland. A contribution of £35k has been committed in support of the Nevis Landscape Partnership (NLP) for the upgrade of visitor interpretation facilities at Glen Nevis Visitor Centre. This project sits within a portfolio of projects for which the NLP has been successful in securing a funding package of up to £1.8 million.

### **Mallaig Decking £70k**

Works were completed during financial year 2015/16

Mallaig Decking is a seating / viewpoint area in the heart of Mallaig overlooking the harbour. Initiated by a request from the community through Ward Members, this project has delivered a complete refurbishment of the facility, including an extension increasing overall capacity by 40%. Highland Council worked in partnership with Mallaig Harbour Authority and the Community Council for delivery of these works which have also included restoration of existing street furniture and installation of benches, planters and community noticeboards.

### **Dunnet Head & Dunnet Beach £140k**

Works were completed during the current financial year.

This project has provided all-abilities improvements and environmental upgrades at both Dunnet Bay and Dunnet Head, including improved all-abilities parking, removal of sub-standard steps and replacement with graded paths, other path upgrades, provision of cycle stands and decorative stone dyke work.

### **Plock of Kyle (Kyle of Lochalsh) £15k**

Works have been completed during the current financial year.

The Service supported Kyle of Lochalsh Community Trust in the delivery of improved local signage for pedestrian access to the Plock Viewpoint as part of a successful application by the Trust to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the delivery of a wider package of community led projects in the area.

### **Smoo Cave Durness £24k**

Works were completed during financial year 2015/16.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

This project provided path upgrades at the Smoo Cave site, which is owned by Highland Council and attracts nearly 70000 visitors per annum to this remote rural area in north west Highland. This work has built upon prior investment in developing the site as a high quality visitor attraction.

### **Dubh Lochan Trail Forsinard £10k**

Works were completed in financial year 2015/16.

A £10k contribution to a £60k RSPB project for the installation of boardwalk for the Dubh Lochan Trail which is part of the wider Flows to the Future initiative.

### **Pictish Trail £30k**

The Pictish Trail is a tourist driving route extending from Inverness to Caithness and Sutherland. Installed by Highland Council some years ago, the trail has become dated and this project aims build upon past investment to develop the route for future users. It will seek to engage with other providers, such as local museums in order to maximise external funding opportunities with the potential to develop and deliver integrated information through the use of museums as hubs (e.g. providing internet access for downloading an app, route maps, leaflet distribution); new methods of promoting the route and making it more accessible and interesting to all age groups. The Service is currently consulting with stakeholders regarding scope of works for delivery in future years.

### **Wester Ross Visitor Hubs £310k**

Design competition scheduled to complete end 2016.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

An appraisal of opportunities for investment in environmental improvements was completed during 2015, which included widespread community and stakeholder consultation. A first phase of delivery will develop bespoke visitor shelters to be used for information, visitor orientation and interpretation at three key sites: Braemore Junction, Achnasheen and Kishorn.

There is potential for the visitor hub approach to be utilised more widely within this and other areas and it has potential to complement the Wester Ross Biosphere, North Coast 500 initiative and Scottish Government Scottish Scenic Routes initiative. In recognition of this potential, additional allocations have been made in future years to enable the project to develop further.

### **Reiss Beach Access Upgrade £50k**

Contract awarded for completion during the current financial year.

Reiss Beach is a popular destination for both visitors and locals, but presents challenging site conditions of extreme weather and erosion. This project will deliver accessible and safe beach access together with a general upgrade to arrival area.

### **Storr Visitor Management (Staffin) £400k**

Designs in preparation for delivery to dovetail with community aspirations for partnership working / ownership.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

This allocation is intended to make a substantial contribution to essential, significant visitor management improvements at Storr, which it is anticipated can be delivered through an innovative approach to working in partnership with the local community through the Staffin Community Trust. Whilst the allocation is insufficient in itself to enable delivery, it is intended to enable the community and Council to secure significant external funding.

Staffin Community Trust (SCT) has a strong interest in greater involvement at Storr as a 'gateway to Staffin' and a positive working relationship has been established between Highland Council (including Ward Members), SCT, Highlands & Islands Enterprise Community Assets Team and the Community Ownership Support Service. Members of the Projects & Facilities Team have undertaken a number of research trips together with representatives of SCT in order to explore partnership models for delivery appropriate to Storr and dialogue is continuing with a view to establishing a mechanism for joint delivery.

This is an exciting project with potential to deliver significantly to a variety of Council priorities, not only realising the full potential of communities, involving and empowering communities in new and better ways through both partnership working and community land ownership, but also delivering positive rural impacts in this remote location, enabling best use of opportunities for external funding, supporting the economic benefits derived from tourism through improvements in visitor experience, contributing to health improvements through promotion of access to the countryside; and supporting communities to do things for themselves.

Highland Council ownership at Storr Woodland comprises an 82 hectare site through which passes Core Path access to the Old Man of Storr as well as a more accessible circular path. Native woodland restoration is underway and information and interpretation infrastructure is due for refurbishment (see Storr Native Woodland above). Storr attracts in the region of 120000 visitors per annum. Allowing for an average daily visitor spend of £50 pppn, and given the fact that this is the major tourist attraction in this remote area, it is reasonable to say that the site supports a tourism spend in the region of of £6 million per annum. The site ranks third (after Quiraing and Neist Point) on Tripadvisor for 'things to do in Skye'.

There are no toilet facilities at Storr which is to the detriment of both the quality of the environment and the visitor experience.

Current parking provision at Storr is extremely inadequate. The small car park and roadside layby were supplemented in 2015 by an extension to the layby, so doubling the number of spaces from 23 to 46. Traffic survey indicates a peak parking demand approaching 80 cars with vehicle movements are frequently unsafe placing pedestrians at risk. Safety concerns are exacerbated by widespread verge parking which adds to the dangers for both drivers and pedestrians.

Whilst there has been significant past capital investment in this site, it is now recommended that further substantial investment is essential to manage the issues

arising out of such high visitor numbers. The intention is not to increase the number of people visiting the site, but to adequately attempt to manage those who are visiting, particularly in respect of road safety and environmental health.

Preliminary investigations have been undertaken and proposals drafted for development of the former timber loading area into a new car parking area providing up to 76 additional parking spaces. Further investigations are underway in relation to these proposals which are complicated by extreme peat depths and slump topography. Early construction cost estimates for the likely preferred option are in the region of £500k.

Research is underway into the most cost effective approach for delivery of toilet facilities at Storr, these now being considered not just desirable, but absolutely essential. Although no cost estimates are currently available, these can reasonably be expected to be significant and with ongoing revenue expenditure implications for running costs.

### **Strathnaver Trail £10k**

The aspiration for this project is to work with the Strathnaver Museum staff and volunteers in Bettyhill to make improvements to the Strathnaver Trail that will attract more visitors to the area and make the trail a key local attraction. This might include the addition of new sites, developing new interpretation and upgrading infrastructure. There is potential to apply for LEADER funding to help support this project and the scope will be explored further for delivery in future years.

### **Foyers Viewpoint £170k**

Designs in preparation.

This Council owned site attracts in excess of 60000 visitors per annum and is popular with both tourists and locals. Past investment has included visitor reception infrastructure, path upgrades, interpretation and viewpoint structures. The latter are fairly modest, limited in capacity and anticipated to require upgrade within the period of this capital programme.

This project is intended to complement existing facilities with a more dramatic visitor experience by the installation of enhanced viewpoint/s and partial all-abilities access. The site is located on the busy tourist route south of Loch Ness and it is anticipated that this project may have potential fit with Scottish Government Scottish Scenic Routes initiative, so enabling added value through external funding. There is ongoing dialogue with the Inverness and Loch Ness Tourism Business Improvement District to ensure cohesion with their aspirations for a Loch Ness Scenic Route.

### **North Kessock Viewpoint £175k**

This project was proposed to replace the existing 'porta cabin' installation at the A9 northbound North Kessock car park with an alternative unmanned iconic viewpoint installation and visitor hub together with improved signage providing better linkage with the village of North Kessock located below. The original purpose of the cabin was to enable provision of a visitor information hub relating to dolphin watching in the Beaulay / Moray Firth area, but the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCCS) chose not to renew their tenancy.

Following further consideration and liaison with Ward Members and other stakeholders, P&F Team are now exploring the alternative of a project in partnership with Transport Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland for public realm upgrade, access improvements and provision of city viewpoint based upon the car park and adjoining land at the southbound car park. Initial indications are that this site has greater potential to contribute to priorities for access to the countryside and high quality facilities management and public realm infrastructure.

### **Highland Scenic Routes £225k**

Members have previously been made aware of the Scottish Government Scenic Routes (SSR) initiative. Generic capital allocations have been made in future years to enable Highland Council to develop proposals. The Service portfolio of countryside sites includes a number of locations which may have the potential for enhancement within this context.

Potential projects might be of widely varying magnitude from small scale 'elegant parking places' to iconic installations, but all would support the economic benefits derived from tourism through improvements in visitor experience and developing Highland as a world class destination. Projects delivered under this generic heading also have a high potential to contribute to Council priorities for positive rural impacts enabling best use of opportunities for external funding and for the enjoyment of Highland's world class environment.

Four sites believed to have high potential are discussed elsewhere in this Appendix (Storr, Wester Ross, Foyers and North Kessock), but there is considered to be wide potential elsewhere and this is a potentially exciting opportunity for projects to complement Highlands world class scenic quality.

### **Cairngorm National Park £50k**

An allowance has been allocated in future years to enable the Service to work in partnership with the Cairngorm National Park Authority in response to developing demands for capital investment within the Park within the context of the six project types to which this programme is targeted. It is expected that investment will be prioritised for Council owned countryside facilities within the Park.

### **Other Visitor Management Projects £115k**

An allowance has been allocated to this generic heading in the last year of the programme in order to allow the Service to respond to developing demand for Visitor Management projects within the context of the six project types to which this programme is targeted.

### **Bighouse Bridge Upgrade (Melvich) £189k**

Detailed designs are complete and, to due environmental constraints on the timing of works on site, these are now scheduled for completion early in financial year 2017/18.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.



Highland Council is responsible for this structure which is currently in unsafe condition and has been closed to the public for some time. The bridge lies on a Core Path (SU19.05) providing access across the River Halladale at Melvich beach.

### **Ballachulish Inclined Plane £147k**

Structural and access works have been completed. Remaining elements of the project are in hand for completion during the current financial year.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

Ballachulish Inclined Plane (Slate Arch) which is the last visible structural remnant of the Ballachulish slate quarry. The arch is a Scheduled Ancient Monument so of national significance and the project delivered urgent consolidation works in order to safeguard the monument and maintain it in a safe condition. In addition a range of activities for local people and visitors aimed at interpreting the inclined plane and its significance, including unified interpretation and orientation infrastructure; new interactive on-site interpretation aimed at families with young children and those with special needs; an oral history project; a traditional slate skills training workshop for local participants; and path upgrades to all abilities standard. Of particular note in the context of Highland First is the relevance of the oral history project to the Gaelic language with the workshop attracting coverage from BBC Alba.

Close working with the local community facilitated external funding towards this project from both Heritage Lottery (£88,100) and Historic Environment Scotland (£77,897) towards overall project costs of £306k.

### **Glen Nevis Footbridge (Fort William) £288k**

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

The original allocation was £150k has been made in support of Nevis Landscape Partnership (NLP) for the installation of a new all-abilities footbridge across the River Nevis in close proximity to the Glen Nevis Visitor Centre. This was a 50% (approx.) contribution to the total cost of the new installation and removal of the old structure which has reached the end of its serviceable life. Tender returns were significantly above estimates. This project sits within a portfolio of projects for which the NLP has been successful in securing Heritage Lottery Funding of up to £1.8 million.

The existing footbridge is owned by Highland Council, which is delivering this project and will have ownership of the new structure once installed. The new footbridge will provide enhanced access to the Ben Nevis path and will be an integral part of new all-abilities path provision in the vicinity of the River Ness.

### **Coghill Footbridge Wick £505k**

Designs near complete for delivery in 2017.

See also information provided in main Committee paper.

Ownership of this substantial footbridge is unclear, it having been 'gifted to the people of Wick in 1893', but it is in significantly deteriorating condition. Following

TECS agreement to adopt and thereafter maintain the bridge following upgrade, PED Committee (January 2012) allocated £120k capital towards upgrade. Technical options appraisal then identified the need for complete replacement of the structure as being the most prudent approach to long term capital investment. The Service appointed structural engineering consultants to develop detailed proposals for a new four span structure, preliminary construction cost estimates now being £460k to £660k. A further options appraisal concluded that full replacement was unaffordable.

Based on site investigations, extensive construction and cost analysis, detailed designs have now been prepared for a compromise which refurbishes the main span of the structure utilising existing piers and abutments and the addition of a new in-line single span at the south end of the crossing.

#### **Packhorse Bridge Carrbridge £50k**

The Service will explore the nature of work required to ensure the long term integrity of the Packhorse Bridge, Carrbridge, which is owned by Highland Council. The Service seeks to stimulate a community led initiative for the long term management of this iconic structure and the modest capital allocation is intended as 'seed' funding in support of such an initiative.

This project has potential to support greater community participation and asset transfer. However, delivery will be dependent upon community appetite to lead, which is the subject of ongoing dialogue with Ward Members.

#### **Old Spey Bridge Grantown on Spey £50k**

The Service will explore the nature of work required to ensure the long term integrity of the Old Spey Bridge, Grantown, which is in partial ownership of Highland Council. The Service seeks to stimulate a community led initiative for the long term management of this structure and the modest capital allocation is intended as 'seed' funding in support of such an initiative.

This project has potential to support greater community participation and asset transfer. However, delivery will be dependent upon community appetite to lead, which is the subject of ongoing dialogue with Ward Members.

#### **Other Miscellaneous Assets, Bridges and Structures £200k**

An allowance has been allocated to this generic heading in future years of the programme in order to allow the Service to respond to developing demand for capital investment in countryside assets, bridges and structures for which the Service is responsible.

#### **Green Infrastructure £325k**

Originally intended to support a Highland Council application to the Green Infrastructure Fund for the delivery of the Council's 'Space by the Water' project, this budget will now be utilised to deliver certain elements of the Space by the Water vision, with particular focus on high quality public spaces and improved access. Further public consultation will be required to agree priorities.

#### **Ardersier Path £52k**

Tender issue end 2016 for completion during the current financial year.

In response to a Community Council request, this new high specification tarmac path links the bus turning circle and picnic site north of Ardersier and supports the development of A96 coastal and landward trails, sustainable travel and access to the wider countryside.

### **Long Distance Routes £375k**

The replacement of two footbridges at Inverlochry on the Great Glen Way was completed in financial year 2015/16.

A contribution of £10k during the current financial year will enable replacement of sub-standard steps on the West Highland Way (Lundavra Forest) by Forestry Commission Scotland. Designs will be prepared for upgrade of a significant section of the West Highland Way above Kinlochleven (Penstock). Highland Council continues to work in close partnership with other local authorities to ensure appropriate targeting of resources.

Investment in Long Distance Routes supports the Council's priorities for supporting the economic benefits derived from tourism through improvements in visitor experience; developing Highland as a world class destination; provision of enjoyment of our world class environment; and provision of access to the countryside, sporting and outdoor recreation.

### **Other Green Networks, Core Paths & Long Distance Route Projects £100k**

An allowance has been allocated to this generic heading in future years of the programme in order to allow the Service to respond to developing demand for green network and access related projects within the context of the six project types to which this programme is targeted.

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