

Agenda Item	17
Report No	HC/44/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: The Highland Council

Date: 25 October 2018

Report Title: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

Report By: Director of Development and Infrastructure

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This Report updates Members on Highland applications to the first round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. note the range of projects that were submitted to and those that were successful in attracting £1.4m of funding from the £3m available in the first round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund; and
- ii. agree that details of projects being submitted to the second round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund be shared with the Council's Tourism Working Group prior to submission.

3. Background to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

3.1 The last few years have been good ones for Highland tourism with certain destinations and some individual sites seeing marked rises in visitor numbers. This has led to pressures on infrastructure such as parking and public toilets. Lobbying by the Council, the tourism industry and others led to the announcement in Autumn 2017 that the Scottish Government would create a fund totalling £6m over 2 years to help support rural tourism infrastructure.

4. First Round Applications

4.1 Details of the application process and criteria for the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) were announced on 30 March 2018. These included an Expression of Interest deadline of 27 April 2018 with full applications required by 27 July 2018.

4.2 In anticipation of the tight timescales, the Council had already started gathering information on possible projects for inclusion, including an invitation to all rural community councils to put forward potential projects in their areas. After the exclusion of projects that were ineligible or not ready to proceed, eight applications were submitted by the Council with a further project in the Highland part of the Cairngorms submitted by the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

4.3 Following an assessment process that included consideration of applications by a panel set up by the Scottish Government, successful projects were announced on 5 October 2018.

4.4 Six of the projects submitted by The Highland Council were successful with a combined grant offer of £1.1m. The further application submitted by the Cairngorms National Park Authority was also awarded £227,000. The successful applications (with the lead partner indicated) were:

- Bealach Na Ba, Applecross (The Highland Council) – provision of six enhanced laybys to provide parking, scenic viewpoints and improved passing opportunities on the single track road;
- Composting Toilets and additional car parking at Blabheinn, Skye (John Muir Trust);
- Visitor Facilities, including toilets and motorhome facilities, at the Storr car park, Skye (The Highland Council). This is phase 2 of a larger project;
- Glenfinnan - 100 space car park with 10 motorhome spaces (Glenfinnan Community Facilities Organisation);
- Lochinver car park redesign and motorhome waste facilities (Assynt Community Centre / Development Trust);
- Mallaig / Traigh Beach - New toilets and motorhome facilities at Mallaig and two composting toilets at Traigh Beach; and
- Glenmore - paths linking car parks, visitor attractions and accommodation (submitted and led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority).

4.5 In the case of the Glenfinnan, Lochinver and Mallaig / Traigh projects, approval is subject to the match funding for each being approved as all have applications to LEADER awaiting determination at the end of October 2018.

4.6 The two projects that were not successful were:

- Fort Augustus car park extension (The Highland Council); and
- Lochaline marine access road improvements / carpark (Morvern Community Development Company)

4.7 The rejection of the Fort Augustus application was due to the fact that the current lease proposal was deemed to be too short for the level of investment proposed so this application will be resubmitted if an appropriate length of lease can be agreed. The Lochaline application was rejected as the panel felt there wasn't enough evidence of visitor pressure and a strong enough link between visitors and the infrastructure proposed.

4.8 While third parties are providing match funding in most cases, in the case of the Council led projects, the financial commitments regarding match funding have been made by the Council: £55,425 has been committed towards the Bealach na Ba improvements and £128,571 to the Storr toilets and motorhome facilities. These complement contributions of £100,000 to parking at the Fairy Pools, Skye and £65,000 to Improvement works to the access road and parking at Neist Point, Skye (which were funded through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund's pilot phase earlier this year).

4.9 The Council has also made a contribution of £200,000 to the phase 1 work at the Storr and has committed £95,000 towards parking at the Quiraing, a project being delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate which owns the land. Along with the RTIF projects, this brings the Council's total investment this year at the visitor sites facing the most significant pressures to almost £650,000 which, in turn, is delivering projects with a total project value of £3.3m.

5. Second round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

5.1 A second round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is now under way with an Expression of Interest deadline of 31 October 2018 with full applications required by 31 January 2019. At the time of writing this report it is anticipated that the Council will be submitting up to 20 Expressions of Interest although the exact number may change if further community projects come in or where multiple projects currently being worked up are combined into a single application. Details of these projects will be shared with the Council's Tourism Working Group prior to submission.

6. Implications

6.1 There are no Legal, Climate Change/Carbon Clever, Risk or Gaelic implications arising directly as a result of this report. However, projects receiving funding from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund require match funding which in some cases will come from the Council. Where this is the case match funding is being sourced from existing budgets. The nature of the fund means that delivery of projects will specifically benefit communities in rural areas.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 10 October 2018

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