

Agenda Item	5
Report No	TC-12-21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism Committee

Date: 6 December 2021

Report Title: Tourism Infrastructure

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Members on recent work on projects in the Highland area that have been funded through the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, including the results of bids recently put forward to the 4th round of the fund. It goes on to describe the current activity under way to produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan which outline the medium-term priorities for investment in tourism infrastructure.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to: -
- i. note the current position with the Highland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects;
 - ii. note the final bids submitted to the 4th funding round that closed in September 2021;
 - iii. agree that the eight areas defined by officers following public engagement and analysis of ranger data be considered as "hotspots" for the purposes of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan; and
 - iv. note the work under way to produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan by January 2022 and agree to delegate authority to approve the version to be submitted to VisitScotland to the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy in consultation with the committee chair.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - The Council employs a Tourism Projects Coordinator who liaises with project leads and submits all Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund applications and supporting evidence including for projects not being run by the Council. The costs of this post and activity are met from the Service budget. Where projects are led by the

Council, the resources required are met by the services concerned. The Council was successful in attracting 90% funding towards the employment of an officer for a fixed term to produce the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan with the remaining costs being met from the Service budget.

- 3.2 **Legal** - There are no implications arising directly from this report, but all projects funded by the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund or other grants are the subject of a legal agreement between the grant-awarding body and the Council. Similar legal agreements are in place between the Council and any third parties delivering projects.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - There are no implications arising directly from this report. However, the delivery of the projects described are expected to produce positive benefits for communities as well as for visitors.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - There are no implications arising directly from this report. However, projects have been developed with elements of sustainability in mind and these were required to be detailed in the applications for Rural Tourism Infrastructure funding. Some elements of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan and of individual Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects will specifically focus on infrastructure that can help reduce climate change impacts.
- 3.5 **Risk** - There are no implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** - There are no implications arising directly from this report. However, in keeping with the Council's Gaelic policy there can be Gaelic elements to some of the infrastructure projects described.

4 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

- 4.1 In October 2017 the First Minister Announced a new Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund with the first round of awards announced in October 2019 and second and third rounds following in 2019 and 2020. Initial awards for the third round were announced in January 2021 when some projects were also added to a "wait list". A subsequent increase in the budget being made available saw four further Highland projects awarded support.
- 4.2 The three rounds to date have seen approximately £4.5m awarded to Highland tourism infrastructure projects with a combined project value of almost £7.5m. This means half of the £9m awarded nationally has been awarded to projects in the Highland area. In terms of delivery, some of those projects are being delivered directly by the Council and others delivered by community organisations with the Council as a supporting partner. Funding for one of the projects was awarded to and the project has been led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority.
- 4.3 More recently a fourth round of applications were invited with full applications to be submitted by 10 September 2021. The assessment panel met in late October but a formal announcement by the Scottish Government on which projects were successful was still awaited at the time of writing this report. Should further information become available a verbal update could be given to the committee.

5 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 1 projects

- 5.1 The first round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw six Highland projects awarded funding with a total of just over £1.1m and a total project value of just over £1.6m. All projects are now largely complete:-

Project	Status
Bealach Na Ba scenic viewpoints – led by The Highland Council	Project complete except for installation of viewpoint walls & interpretation
Blabheinn, Skye - Increased Parking and new composting toilets – led by John Muir Trust	Project complete
Old Man of Storr toilets and motorhome facilities – led by The Highland Council	Project complete
New car park for access to Glenfinnan viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company.	Project complete
Lochinver motorhome facilities - led by Assynt Development Trust	Project complete
New toilets at Mallaig (with motorhome waste facility) and Traigh Beach - led by the Road to the Isles Facilities Group	Project complete
Active Glenmore (parking and linking paths) - application made and project led by Cairngorms National Park Authority	Construction starting November 2021

6 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 2 projects

- 6.1 The second round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw another six successful projects awarded funding. These applications include a total grant award of just over £1.5m and a total project value of just over 2.5m.

Project	Status
Isle of Eigg toilets, showers, interpretation and signage - led by Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Construction under way – almost complete
Glen Nevis Visitor Facilities (public transport facilities, parking, signage, paths and new toilets) - led by Nevis Landscape Partnership	Construction starting Winter 2021/22
Expansion of Bayfield car park, Portree with addition of motorhome waste facilities - led by The Highland Council	Project Complete
Cromarty ferry slipways - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust	Project Complete
Cromarty motorhome stopover with waste disposal and toilets - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust	Delayed while revised plans are developed
Storr Footpath Improvements	Project Complete
New Bridge to provide safe link from car park to Glenfinnan Viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company.	Project Complete

Helmsdale toilets and motorhome facilities	Toilet element being tendered. Further flood assessment work under way for motorhome site
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7 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 3 projects

- 7.1 The third round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund initially saw another six projects awarded funding in early 2021. With further funding being made available, another four projects which had originally been deemed suitable but had not secured an offer of funding due to the fund being oversubscribed were offered support in late spring 2021. This funding brings the total offered to Highland projects in this round to £1.6m.
- 7.2 Due to difficulties in part related to flood risk, elements of one project for a motorhome stopover site and toilet expansion in Kinlochewe were unable to proceed as per the application and this application was withdrawn. However, a more modest scheme involving parking, toilet improvements and a motorhome waste facility are now being progressed with alternative funding.
- 7.3 A further project for toilets and motorhome facilities by the Kyle of Sutherland led by Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust faced issues and so was also withdrawn. Work is under way to revise the project and other funding is being sought to deliver the revised proposals.
- 7.4 The round 3 projects and their current position is therefore now as follows: -

Project	Status
Visitor infrastructure and management in Glencoe & Glen Etive	Delayed – awaiting Transport Scotland
Parking, cycle facilities, interpretation and paths at Ardnamurchan point - led by Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust	Construction under way – almost complete
Photographers Knoll Footpath – Old Man of Storr	Construction starting Jan 2022
Lochinver motorhome facilities – phase 2	Construction underway
Parking, toilets, motorhome waste disposal facility and path linking Elgol to the harbour - led by Broadford and Strath Community Company.	Construction starting Jan 2022
Motorhome site with waste facility, toilet and shower - led by Sabhal Mor Ostaig / Sleat Community Trust	Tender process under way
Dornoch car and coach parking with Electric vehicle charging - led by Dornoch Area Community Interest Company.	Construction starting Dec 2021
Loch Ness Visitor Facilities: New toilet and motorhome waste facility at Foyers – led by Falls of Foyers Toilet subgroup / Stratherrick & Foyers Community Council. Upgraded toilets and motorhome waste facility at Invermoriston – led by Invermoriston Millennium Hall.	Foyers – construction starting autumn 2021 Invermoriston – Withdrawn from Funding

8 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 4 applications

8.1 As mentioned in 4.3 above, applications to the fourth round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund closed on 10th September 2021. The Council submitted twelve applications by the closing date for projects led either by the Council or by other organisations. Those projects for which applications were submitted are given in the table below.

Project	Project lead
Achmelvich Beach Car Park and Toilets	Assynt Development Trust
Canna Visitor Facilities	National Trust for Scotland / Isle of Canna Community Development Trust
Foyers, Visitor Parking and Facilities	Boleskine House Foundation
Gairloch Beach Toilets	Gairloch Area Development Ltd
Glen Affric Parking and Toilets	Forestry & Land Scotland
Kilmuir Parking and Toilets	Kilmuir Community Trust
Kilt Rock Parking	The Highland Council
North Coast 500 Parking Improvements	The Highland Council
Sleat Motorhome Facilities	Duisdale & Camuscross Community Initiative
Stac Pollaidh Parking and Toilets	Outdoor Access Trust Scotland
Ullapool Waterfront	Ullapool Harbour Trust
Lairg Aire *Withdrawn*	Lairg & District Community Initiatives

9 Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan

9.1 As previously reported to this committee, further funding was offered through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for local authorities and National Park Authorities to undertake consultation and produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan that would identify the key priorities for their area. The Highland Council was successful in attracting funding and appointed a fixed-term Tourism Projects Coordinator who has been undertaking work on this plan since late September 2021.

9.2 Work on the plan to date has included: -

- Reviewing and updating the previous audit of existing tourism infrastructure
- Mapping existing tourism infrastructure provision so this can be used in future to help provide more comprehensive information direct to visitors
- Analysis of responses to the consultation carried out previously with Members, communities and partners
- Engaging with other Council services to identify and include their priorities for future tourism infrastructure provision
- Engagement with public sector partners on their priorities and any proposed activities so as to avoid duplication of effort and maximise any visitor benefits
- Identification of a number of “hotspots” requiring either a more holistic approach or additional focus on them as strategic priorities

9.3 Identification of hotspots and related priority activities was a specific requirement included as part of the plan criteria issued in relation to the funding package. Based on the engagement described above and data such as that gathered by the seasonal access rangers employed during summer 2021, officers have identified eight areas where there were particular pressures at multiple sites or multiple pressures within an area rather than simply a single pressure on a single site or location. These areas were also ones where the actual numbers of visitors were high and / or carrying capacity was less so the related pressures were more severe - and this was borne out by the data recorded by the access rangers. The identified hotspots are:

- Glen Etive and Glencoe
- The Arisaig – Morar – Mallaig corridor
- Glen Nevis
- The Isle of Skye
- North West Highlands (Ullapool to Durness)
- Applecross and area
- Fortrose – Rosemarkie – Chanonry Point
- The Aviemore to Glenmore corridor

9.4 During previous deliberations over a Tourism Infrastructure Plan, it was clear that this committee expected the needs of all areas of Highland to be considered in any plan. With this in mind, the approach proposed is for this plan to include the identified infrastructure needs for all areas of Highland, but also recognise, through dedicated sections, the additional needs of the hotspot areas and prioritise some of the interventions required in those areas. This approach would allow the hotspot priorities to be supported via any allocation of funding specifically intended to support strategic priorities while projects that are more of a local priority could still be supported through local funds and / or through location-specific bids to funds such as the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

9.5 The Council is expected to submit the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan to VisitScotland for further consideration with the Scottish Government by January 2022. It is hoped that this, along with the plans from other areas of Scotland will help guide any future tourism infrastructure funding programmes.

9.6 With further work still to be done, the Council's timetable of meetings does not fit particularly neatly with the nationally prescribed submission timetable. However, with work on the areas described in section 9.2 nearing completion officers will be able to update Members further by way of a short presentation to the committee at this meeting. As drafting of the final document requires to be completed during January 2022 it is recommended that the committee delegate authority to approve the version to be submitted to VisitScotland to the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy in consultation with the committee chair. A final version of the plan would then be presented to the Tourism Committee at their meeting on 16th February 2022.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 25 November 2021

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