

Agenda Item	15
Report No	ECI/17/2022

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 25 August 2022

Report Title: Tourism Infrastructure

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a briefing on the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund and the Council's Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan and how the Council is using this Fund and Plan to support investment in tourism infrastructure in Highland. It also updates Members on the status of projects in the Highland area that have been funded through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to: -
- i. **Note** the background to and criteria for the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund and the current position with all funded projects in Highland; and
 - ii. **Endorse** the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan and its designed purpose to best direct future national and local area-based tourism infrastructure spend.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – While a wide range of funding streams in addition to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund are required and secured to support tourism infrastructure development, the Council fulfils a central co-ordinating and project financial management role to enable this to take place. The Council employs a Tourism Projects Coordinator who liaises with Council, community and partners project leads and submits all Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund applications and supporting evidence. The costs of this post and activity are met from the Service budget. Where individual projects are led by the Council, the resources required are met by the services concerned.

- 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 (RTIF) designed to support projects that would improve the quality of the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that have faced pressure on their infrastructure due to the increase in visitor numbers. The fund is a national open competitive fund with applications scored by an independent panel. VisitScotland manage the Fund on behalf of the Scottish Government.
- 4.2 Although the project eligibility criteria set is quite broad, there are a number of key requirements which heavily influence which projects are successful and supported:-
- Only projects in rural areas (as defined by the Scottish Government's official Urban/Rural classification 5 & 6 – "accessible and remote rural areas") are eligible. Projects in settlements above 3000 people are therefore not eligible.
 - All applications for funding must be made by a local authority or National Park authority.
 - The infrastructure provided should be in public or community ownership so private business led projects are not eligible.
 - Projects are expected to address existing tourism pressures. Therefore, new initiatives to develop tourism are not normally eligible although in some cases a new development may be eligible if it is specifically designed to alleviate pressures at a neighbouring site.
 - Projects should provide some form of additional provision so projects that simply cover repairs or routine maintenance are not eligible.
 - Road projects are not eligible although related facilities such as laybys, parking or active travel routes that get walkers or cyclists off roads can be supported.

- Path developments are not eligible with the exception of small sections of path related to a wider development – for example, a connecting path to a viewpoint could be included when a car park is improved.

- 4.3 The first round of RTIF awards was announced in October 2019 with second, third and fourth rounds following in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively. The four rounds to date have seen just over £5.2m awarded across 30 Highland Tourism Infrastructure Projects with a combined project value of almost £9.4m. This constitutes 35% of the total national budget awarded nationally. In terms of delivery, some of those projects are being delivered directly by the Council and others are delivered by community organisations with the Council as a supporting partner. In round one, funding was also awarded to a project in Glenmore, however as this is located in the National Park, this particular project was submitted and will be managed by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. A summary of all rounds and their current active status can be found in the appendices of this report along with a complementary RTIF review brochure that showcases some of the work to date.
- 4.4 A fifth round of RTIF was announced in May 2022 but rather than being open to more ad hoc applications as was the case in previous rounds, priority will be linked to projects set out in Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans, described in section 5 below.

5. Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan

- 5.1 At a national level there has been an ambition to see a more strategic approach to the development of tourism infrastructure. To some extent it could be argued that the projects submitted to RTIF to date have been self-selecting and often driven by the fact that a certain community or group has had the capacity to put forward an application (and deliver a project). While this has been a welcome addition to what can be delivered by the public sector itself it has to some extent meant there is a lack of area wide strategic planning for tourism infrastructure provision.
- 5.2 In order to address this, further funding was offered through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for local authorities and the two 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 undertook the work between late September 2021 and early 2022. A Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan for Highland was submitted to VisitScotland in February 2022 after it was approved by the Tourism Committee at their meeting on 16 February 2022. The finalised copy of this plan can be accessed on the Highland Council website at:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1457/tourism_and_visitor_attractions/148/tourism.

5.3 Following submission of the plan, the Council also applied for a series of design grants to take a number of the projects identified as priorities in the plan to a “shovel ready” stage for the next round of funding. These grants are intended to fund work such as environmental assessments, survey work, architects or engineers plans which are required for the project to be taken to full planning application stage. Design grants were awarded for the following six projects:-

- Event car parking at Nevis Range, Fort William – led by Forestry & Land Scotland
- Road to the Isles Active Travel Route – led by the Road to the Isles Facilities Group
- Chanonry Point overflow car parking – led by The Highland Council
- Stac Pollaidh car park improvements and visitor facilities – led by The Highland Council
- North West Sutherland public conveniences upgrades - led by The Highland Council
- North West Sutherland car park improvements - led by The Highland Council

One further project – an upgrade to the public conveniences at Glencoe village was awarded full project funding on the basis that it could strategically be added to an existing project in Glencoe (the round 3 Glencoe & Glen Etive project described in **Appendix 3**).

5.4 Although some elements remain to be confirmed, the Council has received some further guidance on the anticipated timescales for these projects which can be summarised as follows:-

- Design and additional preparatory work to be completed by 31 December 2022.
- Planning application(s) submitted (where required) by 31 December 2022.
- Applications for RTIF project funding to be submitted January – March 2023.
- Match funding to be confirmed by 31 March 2023.
- RTIF funding for successful projects is budgeted for in financial year 2023/24
- Projects commence from 1 April 2023.

5.5 With a view to the future, it is likely any subsequent applications to RTIF will be shaped and influenced by the projects listed in the Highland Council’s Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan. However, it is also recognised that the odd ad hoc project which can demonstrate that they will contribute to a more strategic network of facilities could also be considered. While RTIF was the main focus when the plan was created, it also usefully gives the Council a steer when accessing other national funds, and how best we can utilise area-based funds to support responsible and sustainable tourism infrastructure in the Highlands.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 1 August 2022

Authors: Leona Joiner, Tourism Projects Coordinator

Appendix 1: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 1 Projects

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 six projects are now complete.

Project	Round	Status
Five Bealach Na Ba scenic viewpoints – led by The Highland Council	1	Complete
Blabheinn, Skye - Increased parking and new composting toilets – led by John Muir Trust	1	Complete
Old Man of Storr toilets and motorhome facilities – led by The Highland Council	1	Complete
New car park for access to Glenfinnan viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company	1	Complete
Lochinver Motorhome Facilities - led by Assynt Development Trust	1	Complete
New toilets at Mallaig (with motorhome waste facility) and composting toilets at Traigh Beach - led by the Road to the Isles Facilities Group	1	Complete

One further successful project in the Highland Council area - Active Glenmore (parking and linking paths) was submitted by and is being separately managed by Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Appendix 2: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 2 Projects

The second round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw eight Highland projects awarded funding. These applications include a total grant award of just over £1.5m and a total project value of just over £3m. All projects are now complete or nearing completion with the exception of two (Helmsdale and Cromarty Motorhome Sites) which have been delayed due to development issues.

Project	Round	Status
Isle of Eigg toilets, showers, interpretation, and signage - led by Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust & Eigg Trading Ltd.	2	Complete
Expansion of Bayfield car park, Portree with addition of motorhome waste facilities - led by The Highland Council.	2	Complete
New Bridge to provide safe link from car park to Glenfinnan Viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company.	2	Complete
Old man of Storr Footpath Improvements, led by the Highland Council.	2	Complete
Cromarty ferry slipways - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust.	2	Complete
Glen Nevis Visitor Facilities (public transport facilities, parking, signage, paths, and new toilets) - led by Nevis Landscape Partnership.	2	Construction underway
Cromarty motorhome stopover with waste disposal and toilets - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust.	2	Delayed due to development issues but moving forward.
Helmsdale toilets and motorhome facilities led by the Helmsdale Development Trust.	2	Delayed due to development issues but moving forward.

Appendix 3: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 3 Projects

The third round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw another eight Highland projects awarded funding. These applications include a total grant award of just over £1.9m and a total project value of just over £3.3m.

Covid related issues such as cost increases or delays appointing contractors or getting them on site have meant progress on some projects is slower than anticipated, so most projects from round three are still under way.

The round 3 projects and their current position is as follows: -

Project	Round	Status
Visitor infrastructure and management in Glencoe & Glen Etive, Led by National Trust for Scotland	3	In Process of signing off grant agreements to move into the tender and construction phase.
Parking, cycle facilities, interpretation, and paths at Ardnamurchan point - led by Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust	3	Construction Complete, awaiting Interpretation
Photographers Knoll Footpath – Old Man of Storr, led by The Highland Council	3	Construction underway
Lochinver motorhome facilities – phase 2, Led by the Assynt Development Trust	3	Construction underway
Parking, toilets, motorhome waste disposal facility and path linking Elgol to the harbour - Led by Broadford and Strath Community Company.	3	Construction underway
Motorhome site with waste facility, toilet, and shower - Led by Sabhal Mor Ostaig / Sleat Community Trust	3	Construction starting in September / October 2022
Dornoch car and coach parking with Electric vehicle charging - Led by Dornoch Area Community Interest Company.	3	Car Park construction complete, awaiting installation of EV Chargers
Loch Ness Visitor Facilities: New toilet and motorhome waste facility at Foyers – led by Falls of Foyers Toilet subgroup / Stratherrick & Foyers Community Council.	3	Foyers – construction starting September / October 2022
New motorhome waste unit in Fort Augustus – led by the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company.		Fort Augustus – finalising lease to move into the construction phase.

Appendix 4: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 4 Projects

The fourth round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw another five Highland projects awarded funding. These applications include a total grant award of £850k and a total project value of just over £1.2m.

The round 4 projects and their current position is as follows: -

Project	Round	Status
Trotternish Peninsula Visitor Facilities (EV charging points, parking Motorhome waste disposal, publicly accessible toilets, and recycling bins. Led by Kilmuir Community Trust.	4	Grant Agreement Signed, moving on to tender and construction phase.
Isle of Canna Visitor Facilities project (new building close to Canna Pier with toilets, showers, laundry. Information and orientation point and ranger base. Led by National Trust for Scotland / Canna Community.	4	In the process of signing off grant agreement
Duisdale Aire (motorhome bays and service point at An Crùbh community owned Hub). Led by Duisdale & Camuscross Community Initiative.	4	Construction starting October/November 2022
Gairloch Beach Visitor Facilities (multi-purpose toilets and motorhome servicing facility at Gairloch beach car park. Led by Gairloch Area Development Ltd.	4	Construction underway
Dog Falls, Glen Affric (car park capacity improvements, replacement of old composting toilet, cycle infrastructure and new section of path taking visitors off road. Led by Forestry & Land Scotland.	4	Grant Agreement signed, moving on to tender and construction phase.

Appendix 5: Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 5 Projects

Round 5 of RTIF was announced for projects taking place between October 2022 – December 2023, with priority given to projects resulting from the early actions identified within the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan. The timetable for the current fund is as follows with the Council submitting nine expressions of interest by the EOI deadline which was on the 21 July 2022.

Round 5 Timetable	
Full Applications (EOI must be submitted prior)	by Thursday 1 September 2022
Applicant Advised of Outcome	Thursday 6 October 2022
Projects to be completed	by 31 December 2023

Projects	Organisation	Status
Achmelvich Beach Car Park and Toilets	The Highland Council / Assynt Development Trust	Progress to Stage 2
Quiraing Visitor Improvements	Ionad Thròndairnis Community Company	Progress to Stage 2
Glencoe Greenway	National Trust for Scotland	Progress to Stage 2
Glencoe Village Car Park	The Highland Council	Progress to Stage 2
Glenfinnan Coach/Car Parking	National Trust for Scotland / Forestry and Land Scotland	Progress to Stage 2
Highland Council Public Toilet Provision NW Lochinver / Scourie / Rhiconich / Kinlochbervie	The Highland Council	Progress to Stage 2
Raasay Tourism Infrastructure	Raasay Development Trust	Progress to Stage 2
Stac Pollaidh Visitor Infrastructure	Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland	Progress to Stage 2
Highland Council Public Toilet Provision SW Dunvegan / Ballachulish	The Highland Council	Not progressing - Given the strong competition and limited funds available these sites were not considered a priority at this time.