

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
12 August 2009

Agenda Item	
Report No	

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION FUND

Report by Director of Planning & Development

SUMMARY

This report provides information on the first round of Town Centre Regeneration Fund applications submitted by the Council and updates Members on the current position in respect of second round applications.

The application for Town Centre Regeneration Funds is directly supportive of the Council's Single Outcome Agreement commitment to create a competitive, sustainable and adaptable Highland economy and help sustain Highland communities.

1. Introduction

1.1 On Thursday the 30th of April 2009 the Scottish Government formally launched the Town Centre Regeneration Fund (TCRF). A detailed briefing on the Town Centre Regeneration Fund is attached as Appendix 1. The Council submitted applications for the following settlements on the 5th of June 2009:

- Wick
- Thurso
- Dingwall
- Nairn
- Fort William

In total £2,356,511.00 has been applied for from the first round of the Fund. An announcement on the first round awards is now anticipated at the beginning of August 2009. A verbal update will be given at Committee. For Members information, a total of 133 applications were submitted from across Scotland for the first round in June 2009 with a total grant request of £125m.

2. Overview of Applications

2.1 Wick:

The project will focus on enhancements to the network of linking pathways that connects the town's car parks with its shops whilst at the same time improving the visual appearance of those key car parks. Enhancements consist of Caithness slab reinstatement, general surface improvements, signage, lighting and DDA works.

£174k was applied for from the TCRF to complement the £210k allocated in the Planning and Development Capital Programme for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

2.2 Thurso:

The works are seeking to complement the major streetscape works undertaken within the past year (£330k). The focus now being on town centre signage; enhancing the Riverside car park (new toilet block £250k proposed 2010/11) and improving access from that car park to the town centre with streetscape improvements proposed for Wilson Street.

The proposal also seeks to create a key water sports amenity within the town centre; with work to the slipway being Phase 1 of an ambitious plan to achieve this.

£74k was applied for from the TCRF to complement the £40k allocated in the TECS Programme for 2009/10.

2.3 Dingwall:

This project will complete the proposed streetscape improvements to Dingwall High Street complemented by new town centre signage and information boards and improvements to three of the Vennels (Wardens Lane, Ormidale Place and Inchvanie Court) which give access from the town's key car parks to the High Street.

£463k was applied for from the TCRF to complement the £460k allocated in the Capital Programme for 2009/10.

2.4 Nairn:

This Project seeks to complete the High Street streetscape improvement works. Phase 1 (£271k) was completed on site in mid July. The detailed contract specification and tendering process has commenced for Phase 2 (£215k), with a scheduled start on site at the end of September, finishing mid November 2009.

£1.32m was applied for from the TCRF to complement the £215k allocated in the Capital Programme for 2009/10 (plus £271k already committed).

2.5 Fort William:

This project seeks to re-vitalise two of Fort William's key entry points with streetscape improvements proposed for the west end section of the High Street and underpass improvements to the east. It is also proposed to relocate the West Highland Way terminus to the west end of the town and therefore capitalise on the significant number of visitors that will pass through the town centre.

£317k was applied for from the TCRF to complement £65k of Council funds, £70k from the LEADER Programme and £20k from HIE.

3. **Learning Network**

- 3.1 As part of the application process the Council needed to illustrate how the various towns involved in any of the bids submitted, would link up with the Scottish Government recently established Learning Network. It is therefore proposed to establish a Highland Town Centre Network – picking up on previous work of the Highland Small Town Networks Project (sharing experiences between towns, learning from others outwith the area as to how they tackled particular problems,

supporting communities to help themselves etc.). In essence this would be a Highland network (offering support for all Highland towns and not just those that are to benefit from a TCRF grant) that closely aligns with the national network. Also, and critically, it is proposed the Network will link this work in with the new Business Gateway service in Highland, and having specific events in support of town centre regeneration.

At its meeting on 2 June 2009 the Highland LEADER Strategic LAG agreed 'in principle' to support an eligible application from the Council for a strategic project supporting a Highland wide town centre network.

4. Second Round Applications

- 4.1 After liaison with all Ward Managers a number of projects from a variety of towns were suggested. However, on closer inspection the proposals did not satisfy the eligibility criteria albeit discussions are ongoing regarding project feasibility in Brora and Tain. A verbal update will be given at Committee if any application is to be submitted or endorsed by the Council.

5. RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Committee is recommended to:

- (i) Authorise the Director of Planning & Development, in consultation with the Convener, Leader of the Council's Administration and Chairman, to submit an application or applications for the Town Centre Regeneration Fund by the 21 August 2009 deadline and to determine which other applications, to be made by others, the Council should support.
- (ii) Request that a further report is presented to the September PED Committee on any second round application(s) made.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 31 July 2009

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APPENDIX 1: TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION FUND

Why has the fund been introduced?

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of Scotland's town centres and local high streets to the economic and social fabric of the nation. The new £60m Town Centre Regeneration Fund is a sign of the Government's commitment to the improvement of town centres, particularly through challenging economic times.

What does the Fund aim to achieve?

The Fund is intended to support regeneration and growth in town centres the length and breadth of Scotland. The Scottish Government is looking for projects that can provide tangible economic, social and environmental benefits to their local communities, thereby helping deliver National Outcomes. Bids that are coordinated through local partnerships that include business and community groups will be encouraged. This is to promote a sustained legacy of improved town centres and partnerships to continue to support them.

Who will be able to apply for funding?

The Scottish Government has indicated that it will accept bids from Local Authorities; Community Planning Partnerships; Town Centre Management organisations; local businesses and business groups such as the Chambers of Commerce; Business Improvement Districts; Urban Regeneration Companies; Registered Social Landlords where these are active in relevant town centres, and third sector groups.

All applicants will be required to prove their legal identity, and their legitimate interest in the town centre on behalf of which they are submitting the bid. Only one bid will be accepted per organisation per town centre. Those bids which are coordinated through local partnership arrangements including, for example, the Community Planning Partnership or Business Improvement District will be looked upon favourably.

Appraisal and assessment process

Applications will be subject to a four stage assessment process:

Stage 1: Initial Sift

The Scottish Government Housing and Regeneration Division will, with the support of COSLA undertake all appraisal and assessment at stages one and two of this process.

At the initial sift stage, any application from an ineligible town centre; applicant; or for activity which does not constitute capital investment will be eliminated. In addition, the Scottish Government will be looking for evidence that:

- The Fund would complement rather than replace existing planned spend;
- A degree of leverage of funding from other public and/or private sector sources will be achieved;
- Spend can be achieved in an appropriate timescale (at latest by end of March 2010).
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Stage 2: Scoring against Criteria

Bids that satisfy eligibility criteria will proceed to the second sift stage, at which point they will be scored against a number of criteria. Scores will be used to produce a ranking of applications which will help to inform selection of the projects that are eventually chosen.

The first four criteria represent Scottish Government National Outcomes and will assist in determining the degree to which projects support the achievement of these national priorities.

Criterion 1: We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe.

Criterion 2: We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people

The Scottish Government will be looking in particular for evidence of:

- Leverage from other public and private sector sources. Higher rates of leverage will attract higher scores
- The involvement and support of the local business community in the bid, through the Community Planning Partnership or other local partnership arrangements
- Creation of employment opportunities, particularly where these are long term and will benefit the local community
- Potential to attract future investment

Criterion 3: We live in well designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need

The Scottish Government will be looking in particular for evidence that the bid will support delivery of relevant local plans, agreed between local partners.

Criterion 4: We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect and enhance it for future generations

The Scottish Government will be looking for evidence that bids will enhance the built and natural environment of the town centre through, for example, remediating gap sites or perhaps undertaking a fundamental clean of the built environment.

Criterion 5: Project can be delivered, and within the accelerated timescale of the Fund

The Scottish Government will be looking for assurance that applicants are ready and able to quickly deliver outcomes. This will particularly include evidence that:

- All necessary planning consents are in place
- All necessary building consents are in place
- All grant will be claimed by the end of March 2010

Criterion 6: Strategic impact and long-term sustainability

The Scottish Government will be looking for evidence that:

- The bid supports local delivery plans
- All local partners have been/are involved and supportive
- Funding for all other elements of the project are identified and committed
- Any ongoing revenue costs arising from the investment are identified and a local partner is committed to meeting these costs

Stage 3: Consideration by Independent Panel

At the third stage of assessment, scoring information on ranked bids will be considered by an independent expert panel which will include a representative from local government, from the private sector and an independent chair. Their role will be to recommend to Ministers the allocations that should be made. In doing so, they will consider the geographic spread of bids to ensure that all areas of Scotland benefit from the Fund. They will also consider the spread of bids across towns of differing sizes and will look to ensure that small and medium sized towns benefit fairly from the Fund. This information will be weighed up alongside the scores achieved by bids to arrive at a recommendation for allocations that reflects the relative merits of bids whilst ensuring a good spread across all of Scotland.

Stage 4: Consideration and Decision by the Scottish Ministers

Finally, Ministers will be asked to consider the recommendations of the panel and to decide to which applicants grant will be offered.

What types of project might be able to apply?

The Town Centre Regeneration Fund can only support capital investment. This might include, for example, infrastructure improvements such as improving pedestrian access, remediation of vacant and derelict sites, streetscape projects which enhance and improve how a town centre operates, access infrastructure, shopfront improvement projects, fitting of vacant sites to provide car parking facilities, or structural remodelling of business premises.

Deadline for applications

The Town Centre Regeneration Fund will be available from 1 April 2009 until 31 March 2010. Applications will be taken in two tranches to allow rapid action and results, as well as the opportunity for all bodies and all activities to have a fair chance to apply.

Tranche One

The first deadline for applications will be 5 June 2009. The Scottish Government hope to complete the assessment process and be able to announce offers of grant around 30 July 2009.

Successful projects will receive offers of grant. Unsuccessful applicants will receive written feedback on the reason their bid was unsuccessful. There will be no prohibition on re-submission of bids for the second tranche of funding. Feedback will be limited to an

explanation of reasons for lack of success, and will not extend to assisting in preparation of a further bid.

Tranche Two

The second and final deadline for applications will be 21 August 2009. The Scottish Government hope to complete the assessment process and be able to announce offers of grant around 19 October 2009.

Successful projects will receive offers of grant. Unsuccessful applicants will receive written feedback on the reason their bid was unsuccessful.

Does the Government intend for the full £60m to be spent in 2009-10?

Funding has been accelerated from 2010-11 in recognition of the additional needs of our town centres in these difficult economic times. The funding does therefore require to be spent in financial year 2009-10.

Will there be a Town Centre Regeneration Fund in 2010-11?

The Scottish Government has no current plans for provision in 2010-11.

Will there be any limits on the level of spending available to each area/ project?

The Scottish Government wants to create opportunities for real and lasting improvements to High Streets and at the same time ensure that the benefit of the fund is felt across the whole of Scotland. While there will be no absolute limits on the levels of funding available to each project, effort will be taken to make sure that no one project or area benefits at the expense of other town centres in Scotland. The Scottish Government also points out that any successful application will be expected to display additional investment being made as a result of the Fund and any other levered-in resources.