

Agenda Item	5
Report No	ECI/7/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 1 July 2020

Report Title: Spaces for People

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Highland Council has secured £752,954 from the Scottish Government's 'Spaces for People' fund from a successful initial bid to deliver rapid active travel interventions in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 1.2 This report provides Members with an update on latest progress, including intended next steps and a summary of engagement activity.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. consider the progress made to implement the initial Spaces for People Highland project; and
 - ii. note that a second funding bid has been submitted for further interventions across Highland.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** A small project team has been created from existing officers, which has some potential to impact on projects these officers would otherwise be working on. Given the significance of the work, it is considered that this is acceptable. Following award of grant – the delivery team, materials and plant will be funded from the grant allocation.
- 3.2 **Legal:** Some of the interventions require Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO), which follow a statutory process, noting that a TTRO does not require consultation and has no objection process. A TTRO has a maximum life of 18 months.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural):** The work is being undertaken with online public engagement through the Council's consultation portal. The nature of the interventions means the project team can respond / react to comments, where appropriate. It is intended that improving active travel opportunities will contribute to tackling transport poverty by making active modes viable options for those on lower incomes or without access to a private car. Relevant guidance, where available, will be referenced to ensure interventions that are implemented consider those with protected characteristics. The portal allows comments on the interventions and importantly comments on the rolled out interventions which will be encouraged, so that any layout can be optimised in use.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** It is intended that these interventions will facilitate behaviour change towards more sustainable travel modes (walking, wheeling and cycling) and therefore make a positive contribution to reducing the carbon footprint of travel in Highland.
- 3.5 **Risk:** Due to the pace of delivery and the lack of the usual levels of consultation, it is anticipated that issues may arise. Given the temporary nature of the interventions any alterations up to full removal can be implemented quickly. Some disruption to road users may be expected following roll out – it is expected that this will settle down as travellers alter their journey patterns. There is a risk that the grant level will be exceeded – but financial monitoring shall occur so that the roll out can be influenced by available budget. The budget includes contingency and also removal/reinstatement.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – there are no implications.

4. Background

- 4.1 In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity announced the 'Spaces for People' fund on the **28 April 2020**. This non-competitive fund is administered by Sustrans and is available to support local authorities to implement immediate measures to ensure that people can walk, wheel or cycle, whilst physically distancing and remaining safe from traffic. At the time of submitting the Council's initial bid, the fund available across Scotland was £10m; this has since been increased to £30m.
- 4.2 Applications are undertaken by Sustrans with the assessment being, protecting public health, essential journeys, and immediate delivery.
- 4.3 A small taskforce was established, led by the Head of Infrastructure and comprised of officers from the Project Design Unit, Area Roads Teams, and Transport Planning and Development Plans Teams. The advice was that the proposals could not address all physical distancing issues, but should be centred where most benefit would be derived. This group rapidly developed 28 proposals for interventions in our busier towns and included Aviemore, Dingwall, Fort William, Inverness, Nairn, Portree and Wick. The application for funding, together with the proposals, were submitted on the **15 May 2020**.
- 4.4 The focus of these interventions is to create safe priority routes across settlements to connect key destinations and ensure people can safely walk, wheel and cycle. They also consider the needs of the recovery phase of the pandemic and how best to accommodate public access to businesses as they are able to open. This is primarily by reallocating road space to enable people to queue, whilst ensuring others have safe

space to physically distance, it also provides active travel routes in recognition that multi occupancy travel is severely restricted.

- 4.5 The settlements that were identified for interventions were recognised as being an initial phase, with subsequent bids to follow. This decision was made to enable officers to balance the need to take rapid action and secure funding from the limited amount available, the initial grant budget was rapidly exceeded by submissions with Highland in the first tranche. Further work to consider where other interventions are required across the region is now underway, including engaging with local Members and reviewing comments received online.
- 4.6 Sustrans approved the initial bid in full and a public announcement was made on **25 May 2020**.
- 4.7 To get feedback from the public and other bodies, a consultation portal was opened, it is available on the Council's website with a well signposted link to COVID Active Travel Consultation. This feedback is used to both refine the submitted proposals – but also to guide future grant bid submissions.

5. Progress

- 5.1 Following the announcement of the successful bid, officers have been busy with the detailed design of the schemes, sourcing signage, barriers and other necessary materials, and liaising with relevant stakeholders, for example, Inverness Business Improvement District.
- 5.2 A series of interventions have been identified as more straightforward opportunities, including rolling out signage across priority routes, removing pinch-points and obstructions to active travel, and improving and upgrading desire line paths to key destinations. The majority of interventions proposed are now in progress. Minor schemes are either underway or completed. More complex interventions, such as those requiring TTROs, or where multiple accesses or requiring complicated design akin to traffic management, are being progressed but, by the nature of them, will take slightly longer to deliver, as they require more survey/design and consultation to optimise layouts. In Inverness works to Academy Street and Millburn Road are planned to commence on the week commencing Monday 22 June, however this is dependent on taking delivery of the waterfilled barriers.
- 5.4 All interventions will be temporary with many appearing as traffic management associated with construction works. This allows them to be rapidly rolled out, altered and removed at a later date.
- 5.5 The grant bid also allowed for monitoring of the in use interventions – given their temporary nature – it does give the opportunity, through such monitoring, to see how effective they are and if they are changing people's travel habits – this will allow consideration of whether there is an appetite for some measures to be considered for future permanent construction at a later date – as we move to encourage active travel.

6. Public engagement

- 6.1 The first application for funding was submitted on Friday 15 May and, in parallel, a public consultation was launched using the Council's consultation portal. This portal shows all the proposed interventions as submitted. It enables people to consider each

intervention and provide their feedback. It also provides a map that people can use to suggest other places where interventions should be considered.

- 6.2 As mentioned above, the comments received are being regularly reviewed by the team to ensure any pertinent issues are addressed. The suggestions for other interventions to be considered are being reviewed as part of the work to seek additional funding.
- 6.3 By 18 June 2020, 814 comments had been submitted to the portal. 141 of these comments were map-based suggestions for other interventions across Highland. An overwhelming 75% of comments received are in support of the interventions proposed, whilst 19% are opposed and 6% give no response. It is of note that amongst the comments opposed to the proposals, some are seeking more ambitious measures to improve walking, wheeling and cycling in the region.
- 6.4 The portal will remain open and will be regularly monitored. This will ensure that, as interventions are implemented, people are able to share their feedback, enabling the Council to respond and amend as necessary. Signage along routes provides the Council's web address to encourage feedback on the interventions.
- 6.5 Members are asked to recognise the extraordinary nature of the pandemic – and the desire to carry out swift interventions has meant that normal consultations and communications have not been possible. It is hoped that this paper will inform members and also encourage more engagement as the works are rolled out and additional funding bids are made and implemented.

7. Future Bids

- 7.1 The ongoing consultation and the feedback from the consultation portal is influencing the development of future bids by the Spaces for People team. A second 'Phase 2' bid was submitted on 19 June 2020 seeking funding for further interventions in Aviemore, Fort William, Portree, Thurso and Wick. Members will continue to receive updates at committee on progress made with current and future bids.
- 7.2 The first tranche of interventions included the roll out of 20mph speed limits in Dingwall – it was uncertain if this would fit the funding criteria but was successful. Therefore, the Phase 2 bid includes proposals for 20 mph limits. It is envisaged that any further bids will include more areas where this measure is deemed to help in encouraging active travel and physical distancing.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 1 July 2020

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Background Papers: Consultation portal available at

<https://consult.highland.gov.uk/kse/event/35394/section/>