

Agenda Item	7
Report No	TC/02/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism Committee

Date: 16 July 2020

Report Title: Tourism Infrastructure

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report updates Members on recent work to produce a Tourism Infrastructure Plan for the Highland area. It also provides an update on the position with a number of tourism infrastructure projects currently under way. It goes on to give initial indications on the range of applications expected to be made to the third round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the current position with the production of a Highland Tourism Infrastructure Plan,
- ii. Note the current situation with tourism infrastructure projects that are under way and
- iii. Note the anticipated range of projects likely to form applications to the third round of the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

3. Implications

3.1 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.

- 3.2 There are no legal 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 There are no community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) 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 There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report. However, projects have been developed with elements of sustainability in mind and these require to be detailed in the applications for Round 3 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund projects. Some elements of the Tourism Infrastructure Plan will specifically focus on infrastructure that would help reduce climate change impacts.
- 3.5 There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.6 There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report.

4. Tourism Infrastructure Plan

- 4.1 Members of the Council's Tourism Working Group previously tasked officers with the production of a Tourism Infrastructure Plan that would help to identify gaps in the provision of facilities and services for visitors to Highland. The Tourism Working Group also received regular updates on applications to the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. To ensure continuity and continued transparency, this report is being brought to the new Tourism Committee to ensure Members are kept up to date on progress with these two areas of activity.
- 4.2 At the Tourism Working Group's meeting on 28th November 2019, Members agreed a format for a Highland Tourism Infrastructure Plan. This includes a simple audit of relevant tourism infrastructure around Highland which in turn will allow gaps in provision to be identified. The plan focusses primarily on the types of publicly provided infrastructure normally delivered by the Council, partners, or communities rather than commercial provision although, where some forms of commercial provision exists, this will be considered when identifying gaps.
- 4.3 Work was well under way to produce this plan with the audit stage largely completed by early March 2020. However, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Council tourism team paused this work in mid-March to take on delivery of the Covid-19 Small business grants to Highland businesses and this work is anticipated to continue until the end of July 2020. Further work is therefore still required to finalise parts of the audit and to identify / agree where gaps exist. Some of this work is likely to be assisted by the Council's ongoing engagement with communities and business groups but to ensure a strategic overview is taken it is recommended that a draft plan be brought to a future meeting of this committee.

5. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

- 5.1 On the 10th October 2017 the First Minister Announced a £6 million investment in a new Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. The first round of awards was announced in October 2019 with the second round following in June 2019. Following the successful implementation of the first 2 rounds the Scottish Government announced in September 2019 that a further £3m of funding would be available for a third round in 2020/21.

- 5.2 The first round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw 6 Highland projects awarded funding with a total of £1.1m and a total project value of £1.5m.

RTIF - Round 1

Project Location	Description	Status
Bealach Na Ba, Scenic Viewpoints	Six Scenic Viewpoints on the Bealach na Ba - led by The Highland Council.	Signed off Grant Agreement, Construction underway (Delayed due to Covid-19)
Blabheinn, Skye, Visitor Facilities	Compositing Toilets and Car Parking redesign to allow 30 vehicles - led by the John Muir Trust.	Project completed.
Old Man of Storr Visitor Facilities	Toilets and Motorhome Facilities at the Old Man of Storr - led by The Highland Council.	Signed off Grant Agreement, Awaiting Start Date (Delayed due to Covid-19)
Glenfinnan Viaduct Car Park	100 Space Car Park and 10 Motorhome spaces at the viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company.	Signed off Grant Agreement, Awaiting Start Date (Delayed due to Covid-19)
Lochinver Campervan Facilities	Motorhome Chemical Waste Facilities at Assynt Leisure Centre - led by Assynt Development Trust.	Signed off Grant Agreement, Awaiting Start Date (Delayed due to Covid-19)
Mallaig Tourism Facilities / Traigh Beach Toilets	New Toilet build at Mallaig with added Motorhome Facilities and two Composting Toilets at Traigh Beach - led by the Road to the Isles Facilities Group	Signed off Grant Agreement, Awaiting Start Date (Delayed due to Covid-19)

- 5.3 The second round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw another 6 successful projects awarded funding. These applications include a total grant award of just over £1.4m and a total project value of 2.3m.

RTIF - Round 2

Project Name	Description	Status
Isle of Eigg Visitor Facilities	Creating new Toilets and Showers, Interpretation and Signage at An Laimhrig - led by Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Signed off Grant Agreement, Awaiting Start Date (Delayed due to Covid-19)
Glen Nevis Visitor Facilities	Installing Public Transport Access Facilities, Parking, Signage, Paths and Toilet Facilities at Lower Falls Car Park - led by Nevis Landscape Partnership	Finalising Lease Agreement
Portree Parking	Expansion of the Bayfield Car Park and provision of Motorhome Facilities for waste and water.	Under Construction (Delayed due to Covid-19)

Cromarty Campervan Facilities and Slipways	Campervan Facilities including Hardstanding, Waste Disposal and Toilets, along with improved Slipways for the Cromarty-Nigg Ferry - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust	Campervan Facilities – Planning Stage Slipways – Ready for Construction
Storr, Footpath Improvements	Creating an enhanced visitor access while protecting iconic landscapes and internationally important habitats - led by The Highland Council	Under Construction
Glenfinnan Bridge	New Bridge to join the new car park to the Viaduct, avoiding people having to walk on the A830 Trunk Road - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company.	Signed off Grant Agreement. (Construction delayed due to covid-19)
Glenmore Parking	Parking management and linking paths – led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority	Signed off Grant Agreement. Work still to commence.

Round two also saw one Highland project being considered as a reserve Project – Helmsdale Development Trust are looking to upgrade the current Highland Council Toilets and add Motorhome Facilities to a vacant land plot nearby. The Trust are also currently working up their project grant conditions to take advantage of any underspend at a national level from rounds 1 & 2.

5.4 RTIF - Round 3

A different approach was created by VisitScotland for Round 3 Expressions of Interest with the applicant given the opportunity to apply for a small design grant to elevate some of the upfront costs associated with project. The Highland Council was required to submit any EOI looking to benefit from this grant by 22nd January 2020, while those not seeking this additional grant had until 26th June 2020 to submit an EOI. The Council submitted 11 EOIs by the 22nd January deadline with 7 projects taking advantage of the design grant. All 11 projects given the green light to proceed to stage 2.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the original full application date of 10th July 2020 has been delayed. An exact date is still to be announced but is anticipated to be in autumn 2020. However, Expressions of Interest still had to be provided by 26th June and the Council submitted a further 7 Expressions of Interest on this date, taking the full total to 18 application.

ROUND 3 Expressions of Interest - Highland	
Gairloch & NC500 Multipurpose Toilets and Motorhome Facilities	Accessible Toilets, showers and motorhome servicing point at Gairloch Car Park to service the increasing numbers of visitors to the NC500 - led by Gairloch Area Development Ltd.
Accommodating the popularity of Glencoe	Development of an overarching plan for improved visitor infrastructure and management on the routes along the A82 in Glencoe and in Glen Etive - led by the National Trust for Scotland.

Arisaig Shore Front	Provision of new 25 space parking, plus 3 separate dedicated motorhome bays at the west end of the village to relieve pressure from increased visitor numbers. Includes seating, interpretation and 300m accessible paths linking the village to the parking - led by Arisaig Community Trust.
Elgol Tourist facilities	New public toilets, realigned parking bays, 480m path linking the village to the parking and motorhome waste disposal facility in a village which is popular with visitors and an increasing number of boat trips - led by Broadford and Strath Community Company.
Motorhome Service point, An Crubh, Sleat	4-6 Dedicated motorhome bays with electric hook ups and waste disposal facilities at the Community owned hub at Duidsdaile to address the lack of motorhome facilities - led by An Crubh.
Balintore and area Visitor Facilities	New toilets at Balintore and motorhome waste points at Balintore and Inver Village Hall with 16 car parking spaces and EV charging points. 30 interpretation panels in Seaboard, Fearn, Inver, Portmahomack and Nigg and 6 road directional signs - led by the Seaboard Centre.
Kyle of Sutherland Visitor facilities	Development of a new network for motorhomes across the area. Inc Bonar Bridge with 5 electric hook-up points and a motorhome waste facility, new toilets incorporating showers and a covered eating area. 5 electric hook-up points at the falls of Shin and in Rosehall. E-bike charging points will also be installed at these 2 sites. There will be an EV in Rosehall - led by Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.
Dornoch Parking	Creation of a car and coach parking site which is 40m from the main square with 40 car parking spaces and 6 coach spaces to cope with increasing numbers of visitors and the increase in the cruise traffic from the nearby Invergordon terminal - led by Dornoch Area Community Interest Company.
Kinlochewe Tourist Facilities	Provision of new carbon neutral toilets and shower facilities, parking bays with electric hook up points and motorhome waste facility at Kinlochewe - led by Community Out West Trust.
Achintee Visitor Hub	A Complementary facility to the lower Visitor Falls Car Park to facilitate and manage visitor access up Ben Nevis including removal of roadside parking and provision of 55 space car park with public toilets and picnic area. Inc cycle provision - led by the Nevis Landscape Partnership.
Sleat Community Campervan Facilities	8 bay campervan site service point with motorhome waste point, toilet and shower - led by Sabhal Mor Ostaig / Sleat Community Trust.
Falls of Foyers Visitor Hub	Improved toilet facilities in a low carbon, sustainable building that will replace a condemned toilet block. A chemical waste disposal point and a public electric charging point – Led by Fall of Foyers Toilet Subgroup / Stratherrick & Foyers Community Council.

Invermoriston Visitor Facilities	To provide a significant upgrade to the public toilets with modernised environmentally friendly facilities along with a new and enhanced waste system capable of servicing the needs of the increasing tourism number stopping at the village of Invermoriston. The group also wish to implement a recycling point for visitors as a lack of was noted in their community action plan -led by Invermoriston Village & Hall Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Council.
Aultbea Visitor Facilities	The project hope to provide an overnight car park and toilets facility for caravans and campervans on land adjacent to the Russian Arctic Convoy museum in Aultbea Wester Ross - led by Russian Artic Convoy Project.
Development of Visitor Infrastructure in Drumnadrochit	The objectives of this project are to improve the visitor experience to Loch Ness through the development of existing visitor infrastructure in Drumnadrochit. To diversify and develop new local facilities to improve active travel options for visitors and to support the sustainability of a new and well supported local community social enterprise initiative - led by GURCA Glenurquhart Rural Community Association.
Kilt Rock Car Park Extension	Expand the current car park and minor extension to road entrance at Kilt Rock Car Park to protect the site from more damage due to the impact of high visitor numbers and add refurbished interpretation to complete the attraction -led by Highland Council Projects Team.
Strathpeffer Together	The project hope to provide an overnight car park and toilets facility for caravans and campervans on land adjacent to the Spa Pavilion in Strathpeffer and public toilets at the Square. Strathpeffer Together would also like to commission and install a rage of interpretation signs aimed specifically at tourists visiting the village directing them towards local services, heritage trails and walks and local points of interest in and around the village - led by Strathpeffer Together.
Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Project	The project seeks to alleviate burgeoning guest pressure, improve guest safety by improving the one-way access, improve accessibility by increasing visitor parking and better facilities for cyclists, and making all paths wheelchair friendly , and improving the guest experience with interpretation and upgrades to paths at the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse complex - led by Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust.

6. North Coast 500 Signage

- 6.1 In addition to the projects being funded through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, the Council's tourism officers have also been working with NC500 Ltd, Transport Scotland and Council roads colleagues on a project to signpost the NC500 route so as to enhance the visitor experience and improve road safety.

6.2 After a successful LEADER bid, all signs have now been fabricated and installation of the signs commenced in March 2020. However, some delays have arisen due to the recent Coronavirus restrictions, but it is anticipated that the remaining signs will be installed over the coming weeks.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 3 July 2020

Authors: Colin Simpson, Principal Officer – Europe, Tourism & Film
Leona Joiner, Tourism Projects Officer