

Agenda Item	3.
Report No	CC/07/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Caithness Committee

Date: 19 February 2021

Report Title: Town Centre Fund

Report By: Executive Chief Officer: Infrastructure and Environment

1. PURPOSE/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Scottish Government has allocated The Highland Council an additional £1,066,000 ring-fenced Town Centre Fund (TCF). On 5 November 2020, Members of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee Members agreed an area distribution of the grant. Caithness Committee was allocated £56,104. The eligible settlements for TCF investment are Thurso and Wick.
- 1.2 While a Town Centre focus remains with the fund, the key driver behind the extra funding is to stimulate local construction activity and support employment across Highland at this time of economic crisis. Accordingly, the Scottish Government has conditioned the grant offer that grant expenditure must be complete by March 2021 (i.e. works completed or contracts signed/commenced within 2020/21).
- 1.3 On 21 January 2021, Members agreed to invest £12,000 of the area allocation on the approved 2019/20 TCF project taking place at 126 High Street, Wick. Members also agreed that a special meeting of the Caithness Committee take place to agree how the residual £44,104 be invested. Of primary concern to Members was the ability to meet the challenging timetable laid down by the Scottish Government. As such it was felt that by working with existing Grantees and prioritising Council led projects, it would mitigate the threat of funds not being committed by 31 March 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. consider and agree investing £16,100 in CCTV infrastructure in Wick;
 - ii. consider and agree investing £25,625 in CCTV infrastructure in Thurso; and
 - iii. consider and agree the proposed variance to the agreed 2019/20 TCF project to be delivered by Thurso Community Development Trust and award the remaining 2020/21 TCF allocation of £2,379 towards its delivery.

3. IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 **Resource** – The additional funds are capital (for investment in fixed physical assets) and ring-fenced with specific conditions attached. The grant can be spent by The Highland Council or third parties. The value of TCF grant being requested by third parties is unlikely to affect international trade and therefore compliant with UK international commitments in relation to public authorities awarding subsidies.
- 3.2 **Legal** – When managing external funding it is imperative that the risks to The Highland Council are accessed/mitigated and any back to back grant award letters with third parties, and financial claims management protect The Highland Council financial and reputational interests.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – The purpose of the additional grant is to support the construction sector with contracts in town centres across Highland.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – No direct implications arising albeit specific projects may bring positive implications.
- 3.5 **Risk** – As per item 3.2 above.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – As per item 3.4 above.

4. TOWN CENTRE FUND GRANT AWARD: 2020/21

- 4.1 On 10th September 2020 the Scottish Government announced an additional £18m through the Town Centre Fund as part of its national economic recovery stimulus package, particularly aimed at supporting construction activity across Scotland. On 18th September the Scottish Government issued its formal grant offer to The Highland Council. The value of the grant offered is £1,066,000.
- 4.2 The grant offer and accompanying guidance includes the following key conditions of grant:
1. *All grant expenditure must be complete by 31 March 2021 (whether the project is led by The Highland Council or third party);*
 2. *The grant is for capital expenditure which is additional to that which is already or would otherwise be allocated to the 2020-21 budget, and should not substitute for existing spend;*
 3. *The Grant may also be used to fund third party capital expenditure in the current year; and*
 4. *No part of the grant may be transferred to the Capital Fund, nor may any part of the grant be used to meet the costs of debt redemption.*

5. DELIVERY CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The Scottish Government in their TCF grant award guidance explicitly states that: *it is expected that local authorities will prioritise projects which are established and can progress in time to meet this deadline (31 March 2021). Expenditure is defined as “It is expected that work will be completed; or, at least work or contracts signed or commenced within 2020/21”.* In other words, this together with the town centre purpose of the fund can be read as, the Scottish Government is expecting The Highland Council to support existing Town Centre located projects that could benefit

from some additional spend, or new Town Centre projects that are 'shovel ready' to be progressed.

6. TCF 2020/21

6.1 CCTV, Wick

The Highland Council (Infrastructure & Environment) are seeking £16,100 to digitalise the existing aging analogue public space CCTV system in Wick town centre and connection of system into The Highland Council CCTV monitoring office. The full detail of the proposal is contained in Appendix 1

6.1.2 There are no eligibility or deliverability concerns with this project.

6.2 CCTV, Thurso

The Highland Council (Infrastructure & Environment) are seeking £25,625 to digitalise the existing aging analogue public space CCTV system in Thurso town centre and connection of system into The Highland Council CCTV monitoring office. The full detail of the proposal is contained in Appendix 1

6.2.1 There are no eligibility or deliverability concerns with this project.

7. TCF 2019/20

7.1 Public Realm Improvements, Thurso

Thurso Community Development Trust were awarded £40k as part of the 2019/20 TCF Programme to carry out a suite of public realm improvements on Thurso High Street. The proposed works consisted of the following activities:

- Fingerpost wayfinding and installation - £15k
- E Noticeboard and installation - £11k
- Benches and installation - £4k
- Planters and Planting - £10k

7.1.1 Regrettably the impact of Covid-19 has hampered the delivery of this particular project. However, the circumstances have also provided an opportunity for the Trust to review their town centre priorities in consultation with Ward Members and stakeholders. What has emerged is a request to vary the approved project in favour of investing £8,763 in market stall equipment. Full detail of the proposal is contained in Appendix 1. The Trust believe that there will be a greater demand to utilise outdoor space in the future and that this should be harnessed in order to ensure the long term future of the High Street.

7.1.2 There are no deliverability concerns with TCDT's proposed variation request. As a stand-alone item, market equipment is weak in terms of achieving the primary aim of this second tranche of TCF grant which is to support the construction sector. However, when it is considered in the context of the other environmental improvements already approved it is clear that it has the potential to make a positive contribution to the vibrancy and sustainability of the High Street that outweighs this concern.

7.1.3 It is suggested that £6,384 is taken from the approved £15k wayfinding budget and supplemented by the residual balance of the 2020/21 TCF allocation (£2,379) in order to allow the market stall proposal to proceed. This leaves £8,616 for wayfinding.

7.1.4 As the scope and specification has still to be finalised for the wayfinding/e-noticeboard, TCDT require flexibility to be able to move funds across the different cost headings. It is proposed that they do this in consultation with Ward 2 Members and on the explicit understanding that the project outputs will be delivered as described.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer: Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 11 February 2021

Author: Alan Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader

Appendix 1 TCF Proposals

Received by Committee Services on 11 February 2021 at 6.54pm

Appendix 1: TCF Proposals

Town Centre Fund Project Proposal (Send to regeneration@highland.gov.uk)			
Site address:	Wick Town Centre		
Ownership:	Highland Council		
Project lead and contact details:	Robin Pope/John Allan robin.pope@highland.gov.uk John.allan@highland.gov.uk		
Description of project. Including where the proposed TCF grant will be invested. (e.g. acquisition, demolition, remediation, % contribution towards capital build costs): Digitalisation of existing aging analogue public space CCTV system in Wick Town Centre and connection of system into Highland Council CCTV monitoring office.			
Estimated outputs (e.g. jobs created, Xm ² of floor space brought back into productive use, ha land remediated, X residential units created): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Replace 8 analogue CCTV cameras with digital pan/tilt/zoom units Install 8 upgraded communication units. Install linkage to Highland Councils CCTV Monitoring office in Burnett Road Police Station Inverness. Upgrade monitoring facilities in Thurso Police Station. 			
Indicative costs (Please provide a breakdown of key cost elements):			
Cost item	Amount funded from TCF	Amount funded from other sources (please specify funder)	Total Cost
CCTV scheme	£16,100	£0	£16,100
	£	£	£
	£	£	£
Total	£16,100	£0	£16,100
If planning permission has been obtained, details on the type of planning permission (full, outline, conditional, unconditional), should be provided showing the date of approval. If there are any outstanding planning procedures/appeals or if there are likely to be any further planning appeals, these should be clearly explained below, stating the likely timescale for the resolution indicated: No permissions are required to deliver the proposed scheme.			

Timescale for completion. Please specify when contracts will be awarded. When work will start on site and be complete, including when Town Centre Fund elements will be complete:

Purchase orders to be issued February 2021, installation programmed for April to June 2021.

Completion by end of June 2021.

Briefly describe what community consultation has been carried out in relation to your project:

Meetings with Ward Members and Police Scotland North Highland Area Commander and Caithness Inspector. This has confirmed that project details address current issues and would enable for future development of the system.

Location plan and photographs of site/property:

Existing are of public space CCTV system in Wick town centre

**Town Centre Fund
Project Proposal**

(Send to regeneration@highland.gov.uk)

Site address:	Thurso Town Centre
Ownership:	Highland Council
Project lead and contact details:	Robin Pope/John Allan robin.pope@highland.gov.uk John.allan@highland.gov.uk

Description of project. Including where the proposed TCF grant will be invested. (e.g. acquisition, demolition, remediation, % contribution towards capital build costs):
Digitalisation of existing aging analogue 12 camera public space CCTV system and connection of system into Highland Council CCTV monitoring office.

Estimated outputs (e.g. jobs created, Xm² of floor space brought back into productive use, ha land remediated, X residential units created):

- Replace 12 analogue 12 CCTV cameras with digital pan/tilt/zoom units
- Install 12 upgraded communication units.
- Install linkage to Highland Councils CCTV Monitoring office in Burnett Road Police Station Inverness.
- Upgrade monitoring facilities in Thurso Police Station.

Indicative costs (Please provide a breakdown of key cost elements):

Cost item	Amount funded from TCF	Amount funded from other sources (please specify funder)	Total Cost
CCTV scheme	£25,625	£0	£25,625
	£	£	£
	£	£	£
Total	£25,625	£0	£25,625

If planning permission has been obtained, details on the type of planning permission (full, outline, conditional, unconditional), should be provided showing the date of approval. If there are any outstanding planning procedures/appeals or if there are likely to be any further planning appeals, these should be clearly explained below, stating the likely timescale for the resolution indicated:

No permissions are required to deliver the proposed scheme.

Timescale for completion. Please specify when contracts will be awarded. When work will start on site and be complete, including when Town Centre Fund elements will be complete:

Purchase orders to be issued February 2021, installation programmed for April to June 2021. Completion by end of June 2021.

Briefly describe what community consultation has been carried out in relation to your project:

Meetings with Ward Members and Police Scotland North Highland Area Commander and Caithness Inspector. This has confirmed that project details address current issues and would enable for future development of the system.

Location plan and photographs of site/property:

Existing are of public space CCTV system in Thurso town centre

Town Centre Fund Project Proposal (Send to regeneration@highland.gov.uk)	
Site Address:	Rotterdam Street/High Street
Ownership:	
Project Lead and contact details:	Thurso Community Development Trust Joan Lawrie – Development Officer
Type of community consultation/ nature of response	<p>Community Consultation in Thurso during Thurso Charrettes in 2013, community consultation using the Place Standard in March 2018 by Thurso Community Development Trust (TCDT) and further place based consultation during tourism and Thurso Locality Plan consultation by TCDT in 2019.</p> <p>Cited within frequent community consultation is the need for a marketplace within Thurso Town Centre. The Town Centre lends itself to this and while has ad hoc events does not hold events on a regular basis. Working with the Thurso Community Market who currently base themselves indoors in the Royal British Legion Thurso Community Development Trust would like to set up an outdoor seasonal market to be held throughout Thurso Precinct area and the Market Square of High Street to the front of Caithness Horizons Museum and Art Gallery.</p> <p>The market stands will be of high quality and durable to the Caithness weather conditions. We would also like to purchase a medium sized marquee which can also be erected for smaller suppliers and crafts rather than the food stalls we intend to encourage on the market stands.</p> <p>Community consultation reveals that more people would visit the town centre if there were more events and a high quality farmers type market to attract them there. Consultation within suppliers indicates that many smallholders do not pursue direct selling to the public as they have no means to do this other than via shops.</p>
Description of Site (including planning status):	
<p>The market has two potential sites. One is in the Market Square outside the North Coast Visitor Centre and throughout the Thurso Pedestrianised precinct outside of the North Coast Visitor Centre (formerly Caithness Horizons). This was traditionally the marketplace of the town. However, community consultation and experience of past events in this area suggests it would be unpopular with the local community who rely on this area for car parking especially accessible parking if it was closed on a weekly/monthly/regular basis. Past experience also suggests that traders in the Precinct would experience displacement if their shop fronts were blocked by market stands.</p>	

The alternative site is usage of the Tennis Courts and former putting green in Bank Place (Ollrig Street Gardens) in this area market stands and marquee could be placed either on hard standing or on the grassed area. The area is in the Town Centre and would still encourage town centre footfall but also negates any issues around parking or displacement to Traders. Storage for the items could be found in the Greenhouses Complex which Thurso Community Development Trust intend to shortly obtain via an asset transfer from Highland Council. A small shed currently owned by Highland Council sits next to the Pavillion on the site and would be perfect for storage of items.

Proposed Town Centre Fund Works (e.g. acquisition, demolition, remediation, % contribution towards capital build costs):

- Purchase of 10 high quality durable pop up market stands including heavy duty fittings and cast iron weights.
- Purchase of marquee which can be hosted on hard standing
- Purchase of portable hand wash sink
- Market signage and banners
- Purchase of trestle tables

After Use:

Thurso Community Development Trust holds all required insurances and would take additional cover as necessary. TCDT will take ownership and ensure ongoing maintenance and sustainability of equipment.

Indicative Costs (Please provide a breakdown of key cost elements):

Town Centre Fund			Overall costs and funding source	
Market Stands (10)	£5779.50			£
Marquee for Hardstanding	£1376.15			£
Handwashing portable	£467.99			£
Signage and banners	£500			
Trestle Tables £39.99 each x 10 if not purchasing marquee If purchasing Marquee x 16	£399.90 Or £639.84			
Total	£ 8,523.54 Or £8,763.48		Total	£

Timescale for Completion (including key milestones i.e. tender issue date, tender acceptance, works start, TCF works complete, project completion date. All statutory consents to be in place and tenders issued no later than 1 November 2019):

- Tenders and quotes to be sourced immediately
- Purchases complete by Spring 2020 with market launched soon after

Fit with Policy (projects are expected to be aligned with national and local commitments to town centres including the Town Centre First Principle and the Town Centre Action Plan; and more recently, the Place Principle):

Complete fit with all local and national commitments. Encouragement of town centre events, taking Market Square back into usage, encouraging local entrepreneurs to sell direct to community within the town centre

Estimated Outputs (e.g. jobs created, Xm² of floor space brought back into productive use, ha land remediated, X residential units created):

Location Plan