

Agenda Item	5
Report No	TC-03-22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Tourism

Date: 16 February 2022

Report Title: Tourism Infrastructure

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report updates Members on recent work on projects in the Highland area that have been funded through the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, including the results of bids recently put forward to the 4th round of the fund. It goes on to describe the current activity under way related to the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan which outlines the medium-term priorities for investment in tourism infrastructure.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to: -

- i. **note** the current position with the Highland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported projects;
- ii. **note** the results of the bids to the 4th funding round of Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund that were announced in January 2022;
- iii. **note** that a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan as included as an appendix to this report was submitted to VisitScotland in early February 2022; and
- iv. **note** the future process proposed to allow delivery of a number of the actions detailed in the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** - 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.

The Council was successful in attracting 90% funding towards the employment of an officer for a fixed term to produce the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan with the remaining costs being met from the Service budget.

If applying for development grants following the submission of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan these will provide 100% funding so there will be no resource implications for the Council. Any future projects that are then undertaken will have to be resourced from Council funds and / or through applying for other grants.

- 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 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 first round of awards was announced in October 2019 with second, third and fourth rounds following in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively.
- 4.2 The four rounds to date have seen just over £5.4m out of a total £14.5m of grant funding awarded across 26 Highland Tourism Infrastructure Projects with a combined project value of almost £8.5m. In terms of delivery, some of those projects are being delivered directly by the Council and others delivered by community organisations with the Council as a supporting partner. Funding for one of the projects was awarded to and the project has been led by the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

5 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 1 projects

- 5.1 The first round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw six Highland Council projects awarded funding with a total of just over £1.3m and a total project value of just over £1.6m. All projects are now largely complete:-

Project	Status
Bealach Na Ba scenic viewpoints – led by The Highland Council	Project complete except for installation of viewpoint walls & interpretation
Blabheinn, Skye - Increased Parking and new composting toilets – led by John Muir Trust	Project complete
Old Man of Storr toilets and motorhome facilities – led by The Highland Council	Project complete
New car park for access to Glenfinnan viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company.	Project complete
Lochinver motorhome facilities - led by Assynt Development Trust	Project complete
New toilets at Mallaig (with motorhome waste facility) and Traigh Beach - led by the Road to the Isles Facilities Group	Project complete
Active Glenmore (parking and linking paths) - application made and project led by Cairngorms National Park Authority	Construction now under way

6 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 2 projects

6.1 The second round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund saw another seven successful projects awarded funding. These applications include a total grant award of just over £1.5m and a total project value of just over £2.5m.

Project	Status
Isle of Eigg toilets, showers, interpretation and signage - led by Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Project Complete
Glen Nevis Visitor Facilities (public transport facilities, parking, signage, paths and new toilets) - led by Nevis Landscape Partnership	Construction starting Spring 2022
Expansion of Bayfield car park, Portree with addition of motorhome waste facilities - led by The Highland Council	Project Complete
Cromarty ferry slipways - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust	Project Complete
Cromarty motorhome stopover with waste disposal and toilets - led by Cromarty Community Development Trust	Delayed while revised plans are developed
Storr Footpath Improvements	Project Complete
New Bridge to provide safe link from car park to Glenfinnan Viaduct - led by Glenfinnan Community Facilities Company	Project Complete
Helmsdale toilets and motorhome facilities	Toilet element being tendered. Further flood assessment work under way for motorhome site

7 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 3 projects

- 7.1 The third round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund initially saw another six projects awarded funding in early 2021. With further funding being made available, another four projects which had originally been deemed suitable but had not secured an offer of funding due to the fund being oversubscribed were offered support in late spring 2021. This funding brings the total offered to Highland projects in this round to £1.6m.
- 7.2 Due to difficulties in part related to flood risk, elements of one project for a motorhome stopover site and toilet expansion in Kinlochewe were unable to proceed as per the application and this application was withdrawn. However, a more modest scheme involving parking, toilet improvements and a motorhome waste facility are now being progressed with alternative funding.
- 7.3 A further project for toilets and motorhome facilities by the Kyle of Sutherland led by Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust faced issues and so was also withdrawn. Work is under way to revise the project and other funding is being sought to deliver the revised proposals.
- 7.4 A project to upgrade toilets and develop a motorhome waste facility at Invermoriston led by Invermoriston Millennium Hall was also withdrawn recently. The Hall however do intend to proceed with an alternative toilet option using alternative funding.
- 7.5 The round 3 projects and their current position is therefore now as follows:-

Project	Status
Visitor infrastructure and management in Glencoe & Glen Etive, Led by National Trust for Scotland	Delayed – awaiting Transport Scotland
Parking, cycle facilities, interpretation, and paths at Ardnamurchan point - led by Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Trust	Construction Complete, awaiting Interpretation.
Photographers Knoll Footpath – Old Man of Storr, led by The Highland Council	Construction starting Jan 2022
Lochinver motorhome facilities – phase 2, Led by the Assynt Development Trust	Construction underway
Parking, toilets, motorhome waste disposal facility and path linking Elgol to the harbour - Led by Broadford and Strath Community Company.	Construction starting Jan 2022
Motorhome site with waste facility, toilet and shower - Led by Sabhal Mor Ostaig / Sleat Community Trust	Tender process under way
Dornoch car and coach parking with Electric vehicle charging - Led by Dornoch Area Community Interest Company.	Construction starting Jan/Feb 2022
Loch Ness Visitor Facilities: New toilet and motorhome waste facility at Foyers – led by Falls of Foyers Toilet subgroup / Stratherrick & Foyers Community Council.	Foyers – construction starting Jan/Feb 2022

8 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Round 4 applications

- 8.1 As mentioned in 4.3 above, applications to the fourth round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund closed on 10 September 2021. The Council submitted twelve applications by the closing date for projects led either by the Council or by other organisations.
- 8.2 On 17 January 2022, VisitScotland announced five Highland projects had been awarded RTIF funding, subject to conditions. Since this announcement, some projects have already met their conditions and are progressing to the construction phase of development.
- 8.3 The round 4 projects and their current position is therefore now as follows:-

Project	Description	Status
Trotternish Peninsula Visitor Facilities Led by Kilmuir Community Trust	Highland Council and Kilmuir Community Trust. £132,549 . This project will develop visitor facilities at Kilmuir Village Hall, in north Skye to provide two electric vehicle charging points, eight new parking spaces CWD, and publicly accessible toilets and recycling bins. The project proposes to install PV panels to help generate electricity for the project, whilst reducing the potential carbon impact.	Working on grant conditions
Isle of Canna Visitor Facilities Led by National Trust for Scotland / Isle of Canna Community Development Trust	Highland Council, Isle of Canna Community Development Trust / NTS. £230,000 . This project will see the construction of a 68 m ² building close to Canna Pier and harbour to provide fully accessible modern welfare facilities for the 10,000 - 15,000 annual visitors to Canna. The building will incorporate toilets, showers and a small laundry. It would also function as a reception and orientation point and a base for the NTS Ranger to allow them to meet passengers off the ferry and give directions, information and guidance on wildlife, sites and facilities.	Working on grant conditions
Duisdale AIRES Led by Duisdale & Camuscross Community Initiative	Highland Council and Camuscross & Duisdale Initiative. £111,020 . This project will provide five motorhome bays and service point at the An Crùbh the community owned Hub at Duisdale, Sleat, Skye. This will include hook-ups, water and CWD facilities which will complement existing provision at the centre of a shop, café, existing electric vehicle charging points, toilets and showers and full disabled access.	Working on grant conditions

<p>Gairloch Beach Visitor Facilities Led by Gairloch Area Development Ltd</p>	<p>Highland Council and Gairloch Area Development Ltd. £147,354. This project will create a provision of new multi-purpose toilets and a motorhome servicing facility at the main Beach Car Park in Gairloch to cater for the increasing numbers of visitors to Gairloch and users of motorhomes travelling the North Coast 500 driving route.</p>	<p>Grant conditions met, moving to tender process.</p>
<p>Dog Falls – Glen Affric Led by Forestry & Land Scotland</p>	<p>Highland Council and FLS. £228,200. Visitor numbers have been steadily increasing in Glen Affric, increasing the pressure on the existing facilities with projected continued increase in visitor pressure due to a rise in staycations and motorhome touring. This project will increase the capacity of Dog Falls car park for larger vehicles, replace the aging and inefficient composting toilet, create a new section of path taking visitors off road and restore and upgrade the Dog Falls Bridge. The project will include the provision of cycle infrastructure and four e-bike charge points.</p>	<p>Grant conditions met, moving to tender process.</p>

9 Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan

- 9.1 As previously reported to this committee, further funding was offered through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for local authorities and 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 has been undertaking work on this plan since late September 2021.
- 9.2 Work on the plan has continued since the report to the last committee. In particular this included further engagement with community groups and partners that might be anticipated to lead on tourism infrastructure as well as further discussions with Council colleagues, most notably around additional parking projects that might be included. Following this January was largely spent writing the plan with additional input in terms of designs and site plans also being provided by colleagues in other services.
- 9.3 Due to Council resources having to be redirected to deliver further Covid business grant activity the Council requested and was granted a one-week extension to the deadline for submission (originally 31 January 2022). At the time of writing this report the plan has yet to be finalised, but it is anticipated that it will be submitted during the first week of February in time for the revised deadline. This will allow a copy of the final plan to be forwarded to members as an appendix to this report.
- 9.4 Once the plan is submitted the Council will be able to apply for design grants to take the projects identified as priorities to a “shovel ready” stage. These grants, which are only available to the Council, public sector organisations such as Forestry & Land Scotland or NGOs can fund work such as environmental assessments, architects or engineers plans etc. which are required for the project to be taken to full planning application stage.

Since the last meeting of this committee the Council has received further guidance on the expected future process which can be summarised as follows:-

1. Applications for design grants to be submitted by 24 February 2022
2. Applicants notified whether or not the design grant application was successful.
3. All design and additional preparatory work to be completed and planning application submitted (where required) by 31 December 2022.
4. Applications for RTIF project funding January – March 2023.
5. Match funding confirmed by 31 March 2023.
6. Projects commence from 1 April 2023.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 31 January 2022

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