



---

**REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 7 FEBRUARY 2023**

**SUBJECT: MORAY ROUTES: BRIGHT FUTURES**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to committee the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan, Moray Routes: Bright Futures and to seek permission to approve the plan and its proposals. The final plan has been included as **APPENDIX A**.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to committee in terms of Section III (F) (2) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the exercise of functions that promote economic development.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **It is recommended that , subject to the qualification at para 4.6 of the report, committee approve the Moray Routes: Bright Futures plan and authorise officers to prepare (subject to staffing capacity) subsequent applications to future rounds of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, once announced, to progress the Tier 1 and selected Tier 2 projects referenced in the report.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At its meeting on 6 April 2022, Moray Council approved the acceptance of a grant award of £31,500 from Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) to create a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (paragraph 16 on the minute refers). Public Authorities were encouraged by Visit Scotland to submit an application for the preparation of a plan to identify capital projects which would address existing or future tourism pressure points. Only those authorities with plans approved by Visit Scotland will be able to submit funding applications to future rounds of the RTIF. The plan covers the Moray Council area, other than that which falls within the Cairngorm National Park boundary, as the park authority has funding to develop a separate plan.

- 3.2 A cross-section project team consisting of the Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager, Open Space Access and Policy Officer, Sustainable Travel Officer, and Senior Officer Economic Strategy and Development have coordinated the project. Following the Council approval of the grant award, a consultant was appointed to lead the preparation and writing of the strategic infrastructure plan.
- 3.3 Sustainable tourism is one of Scotland's key growth sectors as identified in the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation. It is also of importance to the Moray economy, generating significant economic benefits across the region. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector had seen consistent growth over a number of years, with the sector responsible for generating over 10% of total employment in Moray by 2019. The sector was then disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to the restrictions on travel, however there are now signs of recovery.
- 3.4 The STEAM Report for 2022, which analyses the impact of the tourism sector at a local level, indicates that the sector generated over £96m for the Moray economy in 2021. Though this remains below the 2019 peak of £134m. Additionally, in 2021 the sector was responsible for supporting:
- 480k annual tourism visits
  - 1.4m annual visitor days
  - 2,173 jobs (full time equivalent)

#### **4. MORAY ROUTES: BRIGHT FUTURES**

- 4.1 It was agreed that the Moray Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan would explore opportunities to enhance the six long distance walking/ active travel routes in rural Moray. This would be targeted towards delivery of significant long term benefits to the visitor experience, positively impacting the visitor economy and the local landscape, whilst also indirectly supporting the Moray Council Active Travel Strategy. These 'Moray Routes' comprise the network of key enabling walking and cycling leisure routes across Moray, which includes:
- Moray Way
  - Speyside Way
  - Dava Way
  - Moray Coastal Trail
  - Rothes Way
  - Isla Way
- 4.2 The plan identifies key priorities in a package of measures for Moray Routes infrastructure over the medium term, defined as being within the next 5 years. The proposals included will support development of a network of routes that welcome everyone who wants to walk, cycle and wheel, with improved interpretation and infrastructure. This is targeted towards providing visitors with opportunities to move through the landscape at their own pace, increasing the number and duration of visitor stays, and spending more in local economies. The plan creates a pipeline of potential projects for Moray to reduce the pressures on communities through improving tourist infrastructure and enhancing the visitor experience.

- 4.3 The plan aims to build upon complementary recent projects including the Speyside Low Carbon Hub, the Staycation project and RTIF funded Coast to Country (phase 4), and the Lossiemouth East Beach Bridge replacement. Together these projects have brought critical investment of £3.36 million to the Moray Routes network.
- 4.4 The vision of Moray Routes: Bright Futures is that by 2030, Moray Routes will be seen as a vibrant, distinctive, and responsible network of trails valued for their connectedness, ease of use, and warm welcome – alongside the exceptional landscapes and outstanding heritage found in Moray. The trails provide a year-round sustainable network for both tourism and active travel. The trails will become increasingly connected by low carbon transport options, creating economic and social value for local communities, supporting the area's transition to a low carbon economy.
- 4.5 In addition to engagement with public bodies and strategic partners such as Visit Moray Speyside and Cairngorm National Park Authority, key local community organisations were consulted in the preparation of the plan, with their views incorporated into the final report. Those consulted include:
- Moray Way Association
  - Speyside Way Association
  - Dava Way Association
  - Drummuir 21
  - Findhorn Village Conservation Company
  - Rothes Way Association
  - Tomintoul & Glenlivet Development Trust
  - Dufftown & District Community Association
  - Portgordon Community Trust
  - Glenlivet & Inveravon Community Association
  - Dufftown & District Community Council
  - Glenlivet Community Council
- 4.6 There is little maintenance budget for the core path network at present. However, the Dorenell Wind Farm community benefit fund provides an annual payment of £50k towards the core path network, over a period of 25 years. The Access Manager is currently developing an Action Plan for prioritisation of these funds to improve and manage the core path network, which will be reported later this year. These proposals for the wider network will include the Moray Routes and therefore implementation of any work on these routes will need to be co-ordinated with RTIF opportunities. In light of this, it is not proposed to progress with creation of a restricted fund, as is suggested in the plan, at this time.

## **5. PROJECT PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 The consultants responsible for preparing the plan reviewed all 6 Moray Routes and developed an initial long list of 26 potential projects. This list was then reduced to a final shortlist of 11 projects, based on site assessment, evidence from relevant studies, and stakeholder engagement. A workshop was then held with the project team to score these projects against fit with RTIF criteria and deliverability. From this, a final list of 8 projects were agreed,

including two strategic 'Tier 1' projects, and a further six 'Tier 2' projects which cover specific sections of the Moray Routes. These are projects that all fit with the criteria of the RTIF, demonstrate gaps in provision across the Moray Routes, and align with local strategy and the aspirations of communities. The projects are summarised in the table below and detailed in full in the accompanying plan.

<b>Tier 1 Projects</b>		
<b>Project</b>	<b>Estimated Capital Cost</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Smart Destination	£102,450 - £111,450	This strategic project proposes to develop the use of sensors to generate real time user data to inform future maintenance and investment decisions, alongside creation of a visitor app to assist with the generation of data, while providing mapping, route information, and improving the quality of visitor stays.
2. Informed Destination	£87,000	The second strategic project identifies the need for installation of 17 interpretation hubs at key points around the Moray Routes network, to improve interpretation and provide visitor information.
<b>Total Value Tier 1</b>	<b>£189,450 - £198,450</b>	
<b>Tier 2 Projects</b>		
<b>Project</b>	<b>Indicative Capital Cost</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>
3. Access for All	£73,500	Project in Findhorn on the Moray Coastal Trail. This would develop an all abilities path and viewing platform at the beach to alleviate current issues with access to the landscape for people with restricted mobility.
4. Venture up the Hill	£246,000	Project on Tomintoul Spur of the Speyside Way. The project will improve the safety and visitor experience of the route, as it crosses and travels alongside roads, as well as the construction of a new viewpoint in the vicinity of the summit of Cairnacay.
5. Link to the Trails	£450,000	Project on Dufftown Spur of the Speyside Way. The proposed works will seek to secure existing land slips and provide a safe route, alongside maintenance of the Fiddich and Newton bridges, with enhancements to existing path surfaces.
6. Distilleries Trail	£72,000 - £79,500	Project on Rothes Way Spur of the Speyside Way. The proposals are to provide support in the creation of the Rothes Way, as a new multi-use route that the community of Rothes is seeking to establish, linking Rothes with Craigellachie and the established Speyside Way.
7. Historic Connections	£112,500	Project at Dallas Dhu on the Dava Way. This project proposes to create an all abilities

		access path onto the Dava Way from Dallas Dhu to enhance the experience for visitors and people living in the communities in the nearby new housing developments.
8. Coastal Connections	£187,500	Project at Spey Bay on the Moray Coastal Trail. Proposals will deliver route enhancements and improve the signage of this unique section of the Moray Routes, which combines the Moray Coastal Trail and Speyside Way. This will provide a link via the old railway line to Portgordon and beyond to Buckie,
<b>Total Value Tier 2</b>	<b>£1,141,500 - £1,148,500</b>	

## **6. RURAL TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE FUND ROUND 5**

- 6.1 The next application deadline for RTIF Round 5 is 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023, which predates the meeting of this committee. However, Visit Scotland are exploring a change to the application process, which would result in RTIF changing to a rolling programme for applications, with 2/3 funding panels per year. However, this is still to be confirmed.
- 6.2 For projects which require further detailed design work, legal issues, or require planning, it is possible to apply to RTIF for a design grant of up to £20k at any time. If further planning or design is not required then authorities are able to progress directly to the next funding round. RTIF will fund up to 75% of eligible project costs for projects that form part of the delivery of a priority identified within a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.
- 6.3 The funding criteria for the RTIF is detailed below:
- 1 Responsible tourism and a carbon conscious approach
  - 2 Addressing pressure points
  - 3 Meeting strategic needs and gaps
  - 4 Improving the visitor experience
  - 5 Bolstering community capacity
  - 6 Emphasis on deliverability and viability
- 6.4 To support the further development of funding bids and delivery of future projects, it is proposed that a project board be formed, consisting of officers from Strategic Planning and Development, Economic Growth and Regeneration, Open Spaces, and Consultancy. Project management resource will be built into any bids to subsequent rounds of RTIF.

## **7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

The proposal will contribute to achieving the corporate plan priority to promote economic development and growth, also the LOIP priority of a growing and sustainable economy.

**(b) Policy and Legal**

The Council considers support for economic development issues on their individual merit, against the objective to facilitate sustainable economic growth and the desired outcomes of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Corporate Plan, and Moray Economic Strategy 2022-2031.

**(c) Financial implications**

Funding for the creation of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan was provided via £31,500 from RTIF, £3,500 from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and £4,850 from Economic Growth and Regeneration via Business Gateway.

The total costs of the 8 projects prioritised within the Moray Routes plan equate to an estimated £1.347m. Delivery of all 8 projects would require match funding in the region of £337k. However, these projects will only be delivered subject to accessing the required match funding from external sources and securing the project management resource.

Possible sources of match funding for future projects include:

- Coastal Communities Fund
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Just Transition Fund

There is little maintenance budget for the core path network at present. However, the Dorenell Wind Farm community benefit fund provides an annual payment of £50k towards the core path network, over a period of 25 years. The Access Manager is currently developing a strategy for use of these funds to support the core path network, which will be reported later this year. Any proposals for the wider network will include the Moray Routes.

**(d) Risk Implications**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented visitor demand, placing increased pressures on fragile infrastructure, while also highlighting the enormous potential of Moray's tourism sector. The Moray Routes: Bright Futures plan, and subsequent RTIF funding rounds, present an opportunity to mitigate these pressures and grasp the opportunity to enhance the local visitor experience and develop Moray's tourism economy. The risk is to do nothing, thereby seeing further deterioration of existing infrastructure and potentially losing out on increased tourism while other areas benefit.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

A cross-section working group consisting of officers from Strategic Planning and Development, Environmental Protection, Transportation, and Economic Growth and Regeneration have coordinated the development of the plan.

As detailed in this report, a project board consisting of officers from Strategic Planning and Development, Economic Growth and Regeneration, Open Spaces, and Consultancy will be formed. This will share resource across teams and spread the load associated with the development of funding bids, delivery of projects, and ongoing

maintenance requirements. Future applications to RTIF will also have project management resource built into the costs to ensure this is not an burden on Council resources. Projects will only be delivered subject to accessing sufficient funding, securing project management resource and where existing staffing capacity allows.

**(f) Property**

There are no property issues arising directly from this report. However, subsequent applications to RTIF will seek to make improvements to core path infrastructure, some of which is owned by the Council.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

The strategic infrastructure plan will enable long-term economic investment across Moray, for the benefit of local communities from a leisure perspective and in developing local tourist economies. An equality impact assessment will be carried out throughout the implementation of the plan in order to ensure that the benefits are shared across the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010.

**(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts**

The proposals included in the Moray Routes: Bright Futures plan aim to promote multi use routes and active travel infrastructure improvements that make the strategic routes easier to use for cyclists and pedestrians, providing a viable alternative to motorised transport and helping to encourage modal shift to reduce the carbon footprint of local transport and tourism activity. The development plan is aligned with the proposals included in the Moray Council Active Travel Strategy.

A 'repair over replace' approach has been proposed for current infrastructure where possible, helping to conserve embodied energy and reduce resources. Careful selection of robust and durable natural materials and where practical, use of recycled materials will be prioritised in delivery of subsequent projects. Where possible, path furniture will incorporate biodegradable or recycled materials, and all wood products will be sourced from accredited sustainable forests. Project designs will consider measures to reduce ongoing maintenance burdens as much as is practically possible to protect resources.

Projects will maximise opportunities to promote and enhance biodiversity through control of invasive species and increased awareness raising of sensitive local ecosystems.

**(i) Consultations**

Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), the Head of Economic Growth and Development, the Chief Financial Officer, the Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager, the Open Spaces Manager, the Principal Climate Change Officer, the Open Space Access and Policy Officer, the Sustainable Travel Officer, the Equal Opportunities Officer and Lissa Rowan (Committee Services Officer) have been consulted and comments received have been incorporated into the report.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The Moray Routes: Bright Futures plan provides a strategic vision for improving and developing some of the most valuable tourism resources in the region. The growth in the Moray tourist economy and interest in sustainable tourism more generally, provides an opportunity to stimulate local economic activity, support the sector, and improve infrastructure used and enjoyed by local communities as well as visitors.**
- 7.2 The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund provides an opportunity to fund two key strategic projects, which would both enhance the experience of visitors to Moray, and provide valuable data to support future development of the Moray Routes. While improvements to sections of the routes via the six further place based infrastructure projects will enhance and develop key elements of the long distance path network in all corners of Moray.**
- 7.3 Approval of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan and the proposals outlined for the development and implementation of the next phase of these projects is key to allowing this work to progress.**

Author of Report: Chris Muir, Senior Officer Economic Strategy and Development

Background Papers:

Ref: [http://spman.moray.gov.uk/MANComRepDraftSite/\\_layouts/s/15/DocIdRedir.aspx?ID=SPMAN-813460984-327](http://spman.moray.gov.uk/MANComRepDraftSite/_layouts/s/15/DocIdRedir.aspx?ID=SPMAN-813460984-327)