



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL ON 6 APRIL 2022

SUBJECT: STRATEGIC TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To inform the Committee of the recently opened Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) for Strategic Infrastructure Development Plans and to seek permission to accept the grant offer.

1.2 This report is submitted to Council in terms of Section III A (2) of the Scheme of Administration relating to long-term financial plans.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Council agrees to accept the grant offer for the Moray Routes Strategic Infrastructure Development Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The RTIF recently opened the strategic development plan fund offering grants up to £35,000 with 10% match funding requirements. Local Authority areas were encouraged to apply for this fund to have strategic plans for capital projects addressing tourism pressure points for future years in place. Only those with approved development plans will be able to access future RTIF.

3.2 As the closing deadline was 4 March 2022, it did not allow time to present a report to any committee to seek approval for submitting an application. As the outcome of an application was scheduled to be known by 18 March 2022 and the completed strategic infrastructure plan will create pipeline projects for the area, which will also align to all the other emerging funds, the Head of Financial Services provided delegated authority permission to proceed. Group Leaders were also consulted.

3.3 On 15 March the RTIF issued a grant offer of £31,500 with HIE providing confirmed match funding of £3,500 for the project details outlined below.

3.4 The strategic development plan will focus on enhancing all six long distance active travel/leisure routes in rural Moray to bring significant, long term

benefits to the visitor experience; positively impacting the visitor economy and the local landscape, whilst contributing towards the new Active Travel Strategy. It will provide an analysis of existing facilities and local amenities; accessibility and suitability of surfaces; identify gaps / improvements to directional road signage, waymarks, footfall counters and external interpretation. It will lead to the Moray Routes Strategic Development Plan, which will include all the projects and issues which have been identified as being critical to the area and over as long a period of time as deemed necessary to deliver the visitor infrastructure needs, creating a potential pipeline of projects for Moray to reduce the pressures on communities associated with visitor hot spots, whilst enhancing the visitor experience.

- 3.5 For the Moray portion of the Cairngorm National Park, the Tomintoul and Glenlivet area spur of the Speyside Way lies adjacent to the wild and remote landscapes of the Cairngorms National Park, which presents an opportunity to explore ideas that will raise awareness of the international importance of this natural habitat (home to over a quarter of the UK's rare and threatened species, including 80% of the Capercaillie population), without causing any harm to the environment. It includes exploring interpretation and/or remote digital access potentially at the Discovery Centre in Tomintoul, which would redirect visitors and attract new audiences including elsewhere in Moray. Also it is planned to explore a potential new access route and a link between the village and the Glenlivet Mountain Bike Trails (all in partnership with CPNA).
- 3.6 For the development of the Moray Routes Strategic Infrastructure Plan an in-house project management group, consisting of senior staff from Environmental Protection, Transportation, Economic Growth and Development/Regeneration will oversee and implement the following key tasks with the following anticipated timescales.

Key tasks	Time line
Report to Council	06/04/22
Publish Invitation to Quote	07/04/22
Appointment of consultants and inception meeting	Week of 25/04/22
Preliminary desktop study of existing info	02/05/22 onwards
Site surveys	02/05/22 onwards
Early stage consultation with Landowners /agencies such as Naturescot, SEPA etc.	08/08/22 onwards
Draft plan production	01/09/22 onwards
Outline design and cost of recommended projects	12/09/22 onwards
Consultation events	26/09/22 onwards
Final Moray Routes Strategic Infrastructure Plan	31/10/22

- 3.7 The completion of the key tasks will lead to the final Moray Routes Strategic Infrastructure Plan, which will include all the projects and issues which have been identified as being critical to the area. However they will be prioritised in terms of those projects which can be delivered within the next 3 years and address the following:

- Description of what action/projects are proposed.

- The issues and barriers around the project delivery including land acquisitions, planning permission, SEP/SW approval, Landowner leases etc. and how it's proposed to overcome these barriers.
- A summary of costs for the entire development plan including highest level of costs for each project including project management costs.
- Identification of the potential delivery agents for each project within the Development Plan
- Identification of potential sources of match funding including any revenue streams, which will provide income for maintenance/repair and management system/staffing requirements in the long term
- Timetable for the delivery of the programme

3.8 For the Moray Routes Strategic Infrastructure Plan, key stakeholders include existing local access groups such as Drummuir 21 (Isla Way), Rothes Way Association, Dava Way Association, Moray Way Association and Laich of Moray Active Travel Routes Group (Moray Coast Trail); Moray Local Outdoor Access Forum (MLOAF), Visit Moray Speyside Tourism Business Improvement District, Cairngorms National Park Authority and HIE. Creation of the Strategic Infrastructure Plan will therefore create a potential pipeline of projects but will not in itself commit the Council to future action as delivery agent for those projects. To that extent the plan is an enabling activity which stakeholders may build upon.

3.9 Public consultation will include direct engagement with all stakeholders including local landowners, community councils and active community organisations and will be presented via meetings (ensuring compliance with Covid-19 guidelines) and virtually via online exhibitions and social media with feedback incorporated into the strategic development plan.

4. 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 merits, against the objective to facilitate sustainable economic growth and the desired outcomes of the Ten Year Plan and Corporate Plan

(c) Financial implications

The total project cost is £35,000 with 90% grant offer from RTIF of £31,500 and confirmed 10% match funding from HIE of £3,500.

The planned expenditure is for Consultancy including site appraisals, QS, outline design, assessment of Legal/Planning requirements and consultation with communities, local access groups, stakeholders, other relevant agencies and land owners.

(d) Risk Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented visitor demand highlighting the enormous potential of Moray's tourism sector, but also presenting significant challenges to the current visitor infrastructure. Without a Moray Routes strategic infrastructure development plan, there is the risk that it will not be possible to access future RTIF and other emerging funds for crucial improvements to reduce the pressures on communities associated with visitor hot spots, whilst enhancing the visitor experience.

(e) Staffing Implications

As outlined in para 3.6 an in-house project management group, consisting of senior staff from Environmental Protection, Transportation, Economic Growth and Development/Regeneration will oversee and implement the key tasks. This can be done within existing staff resources.

(f) Property

There are no property implications

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

The strategic infrastructure plan will enable long-term economic investment into Moray's areas and will take any equalities and socio impacts into account at the planning stage of the projects.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

Projects selected in the strategic plan will focus on multi use and active travel infrastructure improvements that make the strategic routes easier to use for cyclists and pedestrians. This will make the routes more attractive and easy to promote to a wide range of users, providing a viable alternative to motorised transport and helping to encourage modal shift to reduce the carbon footprint of local transport and tourism activity. A 'repair over replace' approach will be taken to 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 specified and sourced locally to support local businesses and reduce the carbon footprint from supply transport. Where possible, path furniture will incorporate recycled plastic e.g. signs, benches 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.

As a result of climate change, the strategic paths have been subject to increasing incidences of flooding and water ingress due to greater frequency of extreme rainfall events. Key to developing projects along the path sections will be consideration of climate adaptation by upgrading drainage provision to deal with extreme levels of peak loading likely to occur in the future. Projects will maximise opportunities where presented to increase biodiversity and carbon absorption through control of invasive species and planting schemes of indigenous species adjacent to the paths.

The development plan will identify opportunities for linkage with active travel commuting and leisure routes for local communities and account for proposals outlined in the Moray Council Active Travel Strategy.

(i) Consultations

The Depute Chief Executive: Economy, Environment and Finance, the Head of Economic Growth and Development, the Head of Governance Strategy, the Head of Financial Services, the Equal Opportunities Officer and Tracey Sutherland (Committee Services Officer) have been consulted and their comments incorporated.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The Moray Routes Strategic Infrastructure Development Plan will focus on enhancing all six long distance active travel/leisure routes in rural Moray to bring significant, long term benefits to the visitor experience.

5.2 On completion it will include all the projects and issues which have been identified as being critical to the area and the visitor infrastructure needs. It will create a potential pipeline of projects for Moray to reduce the pressures on communities associated with visitor hot spots.

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Background Papers: Documents on file in Economic Growth and Regeneration section.

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