

**ISLAND-BASED STRATEGIC TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT
PROJECTS**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to inform the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee of a recent review of a limited number of island-based projects and to seek approval, based on officer recommendations, on three island-based projects out of this series of previously identified Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development (STID) proposals to take forward for 2025/26 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund funding applications. The proposals were initially developed locally by community groups, or charitable bodies, and further assessed using £35k of funding awarded to the council from VisitScotland in 2023. None of these projects are council-led, nor council funded.
- 1.2 The Scottish Government, through VisitScotland, introduced a Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) to help alleviate pressures from increased numbers of tourists in fragile areas (hotspots). Argyll and Bute Council has, to date, been successful in securing £1.98 million of funding from RTIF for a number of projects, including one council-led project at Fionnphort. Applications for RTIF funding are submitted by a local authority, or a National Park, on behalf of external organisations or internal departments. The council has no financial commitments in the case of external organisations, except officer time.
- 1.3 In 2022, VisitScotland introduced a small fund to help develop projects before submission for full RTIF funding (up to £700k). This new fund was called the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development (STID) fund where up to £35k could be awarded to each STID application. One of the introduced criteria for STID is that it must cover a large number of projects over a considerable geographic area, islands in this case, and not focus on a single project.
- 1.4 In 2023, following discussions with VisitScotland on projects that arose from community engagement by the Staycation and the Settlement Officers, the council was invited by VisitScotland to submit an application for projects that were island-based. Officers subsequently submitted the application comprising 11 proposals for STID funding. This application was then awarded £35k of funding to procure consultants to prepare a STID Plan. Ironside Farrar secured the commission and the final STID Plan was completed in May 2024 (see **Appendix 1**).

- 1.5 Each of the 11 projects (**Table 1.**) was advised of the possibility of an application being submitted to both a Design Award to enable them to further develop their project (e.g. for the planning process and drawings) and full RTIF application in early February 2025. Project leaders were emailed requesting an indication of readiness/willingness to apply for funding. A deadline of 5 pm on 17th February 2025 was given. At the time of writing (18th February 2025) three projects have registered an interest in proceeding, one with the full RTIF application only (Bute Forest P 27 of **Appendix 1.**) and two with both the Design Grant and full RTIF applications (Hynish Trust Page 20 of **Appendix 1.**, RSPB Page 79 of **Appendix 1.**). It is proposed that officers progress these applications subject to member approval (note that the remaining projects may still apply for a Design Grant at any time in 2025 as this has no deadline and may subsequently apply to a potential RTIF funding round, should one be announced).
- 1.6 The STID (**Appendix 1.**) is a live document and that further island-based projects (community based or council led) can be added. The process to add the projects, uses the same format and detail prior to submission to VisitScotland for review. Projects, however, need to be at an advanced stage i.e. shovel ready, and more projects will lead to greater competition for limited funding. Economic Growth officers will work with the council's Roads and Infrastructure Service, the Corporate Programme Co-ordinator and the Aspiring Places Project team to further develop this list as appropriate.
- 1.7 It should be noted that the council owned Arrochar car park (Glen Loin) project was included in a separate STID Plan that the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park procured and produced in 2022 and is not included in this paper as it is being taken forward by officers in the Roads and Infrastructure Service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee are asked to:
- Consider the content of this paper and **Appendix 1.**
 - Note the origin of the projects listed in **Table 1.** and that the STID is a live document.
 - Agree that the three projects noted in section **1.5** above, Bute Forest (Bute), RSPB (Islay) and Hynish Trust (Tiree) can be taken forward to the Design Grant (available throughout 2025) and/or full RTIF application stage, as appropriate, in time for the deadline of the end of April 2025.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The council's application for STID island project funding was successful and an award of £35k was made in August 2023. This allowed for the procurement process to begin and Ironside Farrar was engaged to carry out the STID work.
- 3.2 The STID Plan finished in May 2024 and the final report on appraisals made by Ironside Farrar is in **Appendix 1.** The STID Plan is a pipeline of project proposals,

many of which could start almost immediately if funding was available.

- 3.3 As can be seen from **Table 1** the STID Plan covers 11 proposals on nine islands. Each project site has been visited by an architect from Ironside Farrar and assessments were made on the potential for successful completion and approximate costs of each project. It is important to note that each project has been assessed in its own right.

Table 1. Project list with costs from page 71 of Argyll and Bute Islands STID report (**Appendix 1**), with the projects recommended for progression highlighted with a *.

Island	Project number	Project	Project type	Cost estimate	Potential funding	Evaluation score	Project Lead
Tiree	1	Hynish *	Site organisation, car park expansion, directional and arrival signage	£142,500	Design Grant + RTIF	13	Hynish Trust (community owned charity)
Bute	2	Bute Forest *	Arrival point, car park and facilities	£183,000	RTIF	13	Bute Community Land Company Ltd
Seil	3	Ellenabeich Slipway	Marine infrastructure: Slipway & pontoon	£280,000	Design Grant + RTIF	11	Seil and Easdale Community Council
Iona	4	Gateways to Staffa & the Treshnish Isles	Interpretation signage & shelter	£50,000	RTIF	12	NTS
Staffa	5	Staircase	Pathway – safe, sustainable access	£1,753,000	Design Grant + RTIF	11	NTS
Lunga	6	Paths	Pathway – safe, sustainable access	£100,000	Design Grant + RTIF	11	NTS
Ross of Mull	7	Bendoran	Car park expansion, EV, motorhome facilities, toilet, shower and laundry facilities	£335,000	Design Grant + RTIF	12	SWMID Community
Mull	8	Tiroran Forest	Car park expansion, EV, motorhome facilities, toilet, pathway and interpretation point	£335,000	RTIF	12	SWMID Community
Mull	9	Aros Park	Car park expansion and pathway	£70,000	RTIF	11	FLS
Gigha	10	Arachmore Gardens	Car park expansion, arrival point and toilet facilities	£680,000	Design Grant + RTIF	13	Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust
Islay	11	Loch Gruinart *	Car park expansion, arrival point and toilet facilities	£800,000	Design Grant + RTIF	14	RSPB

- 3.4 The relevant sections of the STID report were shared with the individual project leads. The external organisation’s project leads can use the conclusions within the STID report to seek funding from RTIF or other sources when ready to do so.
- 3.5 In April of 2024 VisitScotland advised all project leads and partners that the Scottish Government had frozen funding from RTIF for 2024/25, but that funding commitments for current projects would remain in place. On 22nd January 2025 VisitScotland announced that RTIF funding for 2025-27 will resume in April 2025.
- 3.6 RTIF awards are available from £150,000 up to £900,000 for larger, or multi-site projects. The deadline for the first round of RTIF project applications will be 28th February 2025. This will be followed by a second deadline of 30th April 2025. Projects must be delivered between 1st April 2025 and 1st March 2027 although priority may be given to those projects which can be completed by 1st March 2026. VisitScotland has not advised of any further application deadlines as this will most likely depend on the number and size of awards made in the first two rounds.
- 3.7 To support new applications, a Design Grant will be available for applications to be submitted anytime up to 1st December 2025, subject to funds being available. Design Grants will be available up to £20,000 with 100% intervention rate. Design projects

must be completed by 1st March 2026. Progression towards a full RTIF funding application is not reliant on obtaining a Design Grant Award but will provide further supporting information where needed.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The STID Plan is a pipeline of project proposals in **Appendix 1**, many of which could start almost immediately subject to finance being available. On this basis, officers are working closely with the council's Corporate Programme Co-ordinator and officers in the Aspiring Places team.
- 4.2 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund awards for 2025-27 are available from £150,000 up to £900,000 for larger or multi-site projects.
- 4.3 Officers are proposing a list of three projects out of 11 proposals in the STID Plan are taken forward for the current round of 2025/26 RTIF funding applications.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – tourism is a key sector for Argyll and Bute as outlined the Argyll and Bute Council Economic Strategy, 2024-34.
- 5.2 Financial – potential to secure significant external funding for three community island projects. No contribution from the council is required.
- 5.3 Legal – none.
- 5.4 HR – officer time to support the application process and to undertake the financial monitoring.
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty - the Fairer Scotland Duty, Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010, came into force in April 2018. The duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland, such as Argyll and Bute Council, to pay due regard to (actively consider) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome, caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions and how this has been implemented
 - 5.5.1 Equalities - all activities have complied with all Equal Opportunities/Fairer Scotland Duty policies and obligations
 - 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - all activities will comply with the council's Socio-economic Duty
 - 5.5.3 Islands – all of the STID projects included are island based.
- 5.6 Climate Change - all projects have been assessed with regard to climate change.
- 5.7 Risk – none.
- 5.8 Customer Service – none.
- 5.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – none.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Argyll and Bute Islands Sustainable Tourism Infrastructure Development Report