

## Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Round 4

### Guidance for applicants

#### Introduction

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund was established by the Scottish Government and Fund is managed by VisitScotland on their behalf. To date £9m of grant funding has been awarded to 45 projects across rural Scotland since the start of the Fund in 2018. RTIF is designed to support collaborative projects that focused on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that are facing immediate and damaging pressures on their infrastructure or negative impacts on communities due to significant increases in visitor numbers.

This need has become more evident in many areas following the COVID-19 outbreak and the relaxation of the lockdown in summer 2020.

The Scottish Government has established the Scottish Tourism Recovery Taskforce (STRT), led by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism and the Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, is responsible for strategic oversight of, challenging, and advising on, recovery plans in response to the COVID-19 impact on Scottish tourism and hospitality.

The STRT is responsible for ensuring that the tourism recovery plan is fully coordinated with wider Scottish Government and other relevant sectoral recovery plans, and with our tourism strategy Scotland Outlook 2030. As part of the taskforce a new national Visitor Management Steering Group has been established to coordinate the work that that lots of different organisations are doing on visitor management issues in Scotland and to establish priorities and future direction with Investment/Infrastructure sub-group looking at future infrastructure priorities.

Round 4 of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund will support the delivery of many of the Infrastructure needs identified by the Taskforce where these meet the RTIF objectives and criteria.

RTIF recognises that the demand will come from the domestic market over the next few years as the industry recovers from Covid however it is anticipated that many of the characteristics of visitor pressure points will still be evident if not enhanced by this . The growth in the motorhome sector has resulted in pressure in some areas, at certain times of the year, leading to a poorer visitor experience, negative impacts on some local communities and pressure on the environment as the current infrastructure is unable to accommodate the growing numbers. This is likely to continue in future years as is the pressure on car parking and access although this should be tempered with long term sustainability measures and encourage greater access by non-motorised traffic and public transport.

The 4th Round will look to build on the momentum created by previous rounds of the RTIF and the unfulfilled demand for support to realise a more strategic network of facilities which will meet the needs of our visitors for years to come, drive Scotland's rural areas to become world class destinations with the ability to meet future visitor expectations.

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is a platform which will provide leverage for additional and focused investment, stimulate collaboration, build capacity within communities and meet the Scottish Government's commitment to addressing climate change and the transition of Scotland to a low carbon society.

RTIF will continue to support collaborative projects that focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that have faced pressure on their infrastructure or negative impacts on communities due to significant increases in visitor numbers but will also look forward to address anticipated future pinch points as a result of growth initiatives such as route development, major events, film and TV production as well as the continued growth in the motorhome sector.

Successful applications must demonstrate the following:

- **An Existing or anticipated Visitor Pressure Point** – As a result of previous increases in visitor numbers, there is a visitor and/or community pressure point which is likely to continue and needs to be addressed. This includes anticipated visitor pressure point arising from changes in the market. The applicant should provide evidence of the increase in visitor numbers or anticipated impact of visitor number and/or evidence of the impact of visitors on the local area. The applicant should provide a strategic context for the project and evidence to support this.
- **An enhanced visitor experience** – through the provision of improved visitor facilities and infrastructure, particularly in areas that have experienced pressure from increased visitor numbers, leading to a positive impact on the local landscape and visitor economy. Please demonstrate how your project will accommodate visitors with a wide variety of access needs and how the project complies with and where possible exceeds the requirements of the Equality Act.
- **A Responsible Tourism approach** – applicants are expected to take a responsible tourism approach to the planning, design and management of the infrastructure provision. Applicants should provide details on how their project will contribute to the reduction/mitigation of climate change and support the transition to a low carbon society i.e. through the use of low carbon materials, energy efficiency, promotion of low carbon transport, renewable energy and waste management in construction and maintenance of the facilities.
- **Community capacity building** – creating more resilient communities more able to cope with peak tourism demands and the creation of new local business opportunities.
- **Effective partnerships and collaboration** – You must evidence engagement with local community groups, destination organisations and tourism businesses, demonstrating how partnership working can increase awareness, advocacy and the quality of the final project
- **Project viability and deliverability** – applicants must provide evidence of:
  - Proven experience of project management and financial administration.
  - A clear timetable for permissions, procurement, site start date and expected time of completion.

- A clear delivery plan demonstrating value for money and measurable outputs.
- Detailed costs and a budget forecast for the period of the project.

## Funding Criteria

- RTIF Round 4 is for projects which run from 1st November 2021 until 31st March 2023. All projects must be completed and final claims received by 31st March 2023.
- Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund awards are available from £75,000 up to a maximum of £375,000 for larger, multi-site projects.
- RTIF can provide Applicants with support up to 70% of approved project activity. There is the potential to award a **maximum** of 75% for projects with which have a strong strategic rationale.
- Applicants must provide a **minimum** of 25% match funding for the projects looking for the maximum 75% and 30% for other projects, although this can include In Kind Support in the form of labour or land value.
- A small amount of RTIF funding will be made available to applicants approved at EOI stage to support design and facilitate the planning process. This will be available up to maximum of £5,000 based on a maximum 50% intervention rate.
- **Applicants must have submitted a planning application by the time of the Stage 2 deadline and evidence must be provided to support this with the Stage 2 submission.**
- RTIF is open to applications from the Local Authorities and the National Park Authorities. A collaborative approach must be demonstrated with a strong buy-in and project support from local communities and tourism groups.
- The fund will only be applicable to rural areas as defined by the Scottish Government's official Urban/Rural classification 5 & 6 – “accessible and remote rural areas” excluding settlements above 3000 people.
- The fund is for rural areas across Scotland (as defined above) but would exclude towns and larger villages within these locations. Primarily it is to support infrastructure requirements around (non-paid for) visitor or natural attractions, i.e. areas of outstanding scenic beauty, that have attracted increased visitor numbers and to stop deterioration of the natural and built environment, as well as benefitting local communities in the area.
- RTIF will support projects where there is an existing visitor pressure points **or there is an expectation of a future pressure point from additional visitor numbers due to growth initiatives such as route development, events, increases in sector specific activity such as cruising, film and tv production.**
- Projects which have a negative impact on the natural heritage, including species and habitats, geology, landscapes and water courses will not be supported. Advice should be sought early on from appropriate bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA.
- RTIF cannot support projects that have been refused planning permission.
- RTIF cannot support any road improvement works that fall within the remit of the Local Authorities or Transport Scotland.

## Eligible Project Activity

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Eligible Activity	
Project Activity which is eligible for support	Round 4
Parking	New or upgraded Car Parking including new disabled parking and dedicated motorhome and coach parking.
Essential Improvement works to paths	Paths of not more than 500m to and from car parks and scenic areas to ease access and address pressure points.
Scenic laybys	Scenic roadside viewpoints.
Camping Facilities	Overnight Motorhome Bays with or without electrical hook up points and camping provision where there is a demonstrable gap in the market.
Toilet Provision	New or upgrades to existing Toilets where this creates additional provision and promotes Equality of access, particularly where these exceed minimum standards.
Disposal points (especially for Campervans)	Chemical waste disposal facilities, water supplies and black and grey waste disposal facilities for campers and motorhomes.
Recycling Points	Recycling Points.
Road signage, waymarks and interpretation	Directional road signage, waymarks and improved external interpretation.
Sustainable tourism	Interventions that encourage sustainable tourism, including, electric vehicle charging points, cycle racks and support access by public transport Signage and information management systems to support more sustainable management of visitor pressure points and dispersal to other sites can be included in the eligible costs.
Project Management	Project management up to a limit of 10% of the total construction costs where these relate to strategic and collaborative projects and covering both in house and contracted project management. Can only be claimed for actual construction period.
Land purchase	Land purchase or in-kind land costs where these are accompanied by an external valuation.
Design Costs	Designs costs up to £5000 to support the development of strategic and collaborative projects receiving EOI approval. Can include in house or contracted costs.
Irrecoverable VAT	The RTIF Award is not subject to VAT. The RTIF Award will <b>NOT</b> be increased, should any VAT liability arise for the applicant group. The RTIF Award is inclusive of VAT, if any, payable thereon and it is the responsibility of the applicant group to ensure that their treatment of VAT relative to the Award is correct. Irrecoverable VAT can be claimed on receipt of confirmation from the appropriate authority.

## Ineligible Project Activity

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Ineligible Activity	
Type of activity CAN NOT be supported under RTIF	Round 4
	Activity ineligible for support through Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund award includes: -
Business Development	NB. The fund is guided by UK State Aid legislation and cannot support the commercial provision of facilities.
Visitor attractions	Funding new visitor attractions or paid visitor attractions.
Community facilities	Community facilities such as village halls, playparks or bespoke community parking or provision of facilities for the sole purpose of generating income etc.
Roads	Any works which fall under the classification of roads infrastructure including provision of passing places.
Broadband infrastructure	The development or creation of Broadband infrastructure.
Maintenance or repair works	Routine maintenance for buildings and facilities or repair of cycling and walking infrastructure.
Marketing	Production of marketing and promotional materials, such as leaflets, web sites or social media activity.
Revenue Costs	Ongoing revenue costs associated with the project including rental/lease costs or maintenance.
Overhead Costs	Admin, finance or property overhead costs either during or post the project delivery or as part of project management costs.
Staffing costs	Staffing costs following completion of the project.
New Routes	New cycle routes or long-distance paths or routes – the exception to this, as outlined previously, is where the creation of linking paths as part of a wider development.
Feasibility Studies	Any feasibility Studies or pilot projects.
Path Development	Paths which are more than 500m in length.

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund team work closely with other public sector agencies to ensure alignment of Grant award scheme opportunities. Your Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Manager can discuss this with you and signpost as appropriate.

## Application Process

### Stage 1 - Expression of Interest

Applications to the RTIF area being conducted under a 2-stage process. The Stage 1 Expressions of Interest assessment is based on the limited information submitted on the EOI and enables a basic eligibility check to be undertaken by VisitScotland and some feedback to be given to applicants. All project must submit an Expression of Interest although you can do this anytime up to **Friday 13 August 2021**.

Under Round 4, applicants will have the opportunity to apply for Design Funding as part of the EOI process. Applications which are approved to Stage 2 can receive up to £5,000 at a maximum rate of 50% to support design with a view to speeding up the planning process. This element will involve Architecture & Design Scotland in the assessment process.

**The invitation to proceed to Stage 2 and submit a full application or the awarding of the Design Grant is not a guarantee that your project will be approved by the Assessment panel.**

**If you wish to apply for a Design Grant then you must submit your Expression of Interest by no later than Wednesday 19 May 2021.**

### **Stage 2 - Full Application**

Under Round 4 applicants will have 16 weeks from the notification of approved EOIs to develop their Stage 2 application which must be submitted by **Friday 10 September 2021**.

Stage 2 applications will be assessed by the RTIF Assessment Panel which consists of representatives of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise, COSLA, Scottish Natural Heritage, Architecture and Design Scotland as well as VisitScotland. The timetable for the Assessment Panel decisions is outlined in the timetable at the end of this paper.

### **Assessment Criteria**

The Assessment Panel will assess and score projects against the following criteria:

- **An Existing or anticipated Visitor Pressure Point** – As a result of an increase in visitors, there is a visitor and or community pressure point which needs to be addressed. This includes anticipated visitor pressure point arising from future growth in the defined sectors. The applicant should provide evidence of the increase in visitor numbers or anticipated impact of visitor number and/or evidence of the impact of visitors on the local area. The applicant should provide a strategic context for the project and evidence to support this.
- **An enhanced visitor experience** – through the provision of improved visitor facilities and infrastructure, particularly in areas that have experienced pressure from increased visitor numbers, leading to a positive impact on the local landscape and visitor economy. Please demonstrate how you project will accommodate visitors with a wide variety of access needs and how the project complies with and where possible exceeds the requirements of the Equality Act.
- **A Responsible Tourism approach** – applicants are expected to take a Responsible Tourism Approach to the planning, design and management of the infrastructure provision and address long term sustainability issues. Applicants should provide details on how their project will contribute to the reduction/mitigation of climate change and support the transition to a low carbon society i.e. through the use of low carbon materials, energy efficiency, promotion of low carbon transport, renewable energy and waste management in construction and maintenance of the facilities.
- **Community capacity building** – creating more resilient communities more able to cope with peak tourism demands and the creation of new local business opportunities.

- **Effective partnerships and collaboration** – You must evidence engagement with local community groups, destination organisations and tourism businesses, demonstrating how partnership working can increase awareness, advocacy and the quality of the final project.
- **Project viability and deliverability** – applicants must provide evidence of:
  - Proven experience of project management and financial administration
  - A clear timetable for permissions, procurement, site start date and expected time of completion
  - A clear delivery plan demonstrating value for money and measurable outputs
  - Detailed costs and a budget forecast for the period of the project

**Priority may be given to applications which can demonstrate:**

1. That the project is part of a strategic development plan for a location or sector.
2. That they are sustainable, innovative, integrated projects which resolve both an immediate visitor pressure point but take account of wider area pressures.
3. Alignment with the priority areas identified by the Scottish Tourism Recovery Taskforce (STRT).
4. Projects which have a higher level of match funding.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

One of the key requirements of the fund is to monitor and evaluate your project, track its progress, understand what activity has been delivered and, where appropriate, what the direct and indirect impact of the project has been on the area or community benefitting from the funding. It is important that you gather evidence that demonstrates the impact of your project. You will need to describe how you will do this in your application form.

Monitoring and evaluation is useful, in terms of being able to further develop and learn from the project work undertaken. At the end of the Agreement period, and as a condition of the final payment, you must submit a satisfactory final monitoring and evaluation report with an income and expenditure account.

## Recognition and Acknowledgement

As part of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Agreement all supported projects are required to acknowledge Scottish Government and VisitScotland support in all PR activity, undertaken as part of the project. Details of this will be included with any grant award.

## How to Apply

Applicants should discuss their proposal with a member of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure team prior to making a full application well in advance of the application deadlines. Please contact the team at [RTIF@visitscotland.com](mailto:RTIF@visitscotland.com) to discuss your application or complete the expression of interest form and we can get back to you.

To help with your preparation and planning, Word versions of the application forms, guidance and an FAQ paper are available to download from the VisitScotland website at [http://www.visitscotland.org/business\\_support/advice\\_materials/funding\\_opportunities.aspx](http://www.visitscotland.org/business_support/advice_materials/funding_opportunities.aspx) or by contacting Lynn Hamilton, the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Manager at [Lynn.Hamilton@visitscotland.com](mailto:Lynn.Hamilton@visitscotland.com) or on Tel No, 01786 459205.

You should submit your application to [RTIF@visitscotland.com](mailto:RTIF@visitscotland.com) by 5pm on the day of the relevant application deadline.

VisitScotland aims to notify applicants of the outcome of their application within 20 working days of the decision-making panel meeting.

### RTIF Round 4 Timetable

The timescale for Round 4 of the RTIF is outlined below:

Round 4	Deadlines
Deadline for Round 4 Expressions of Interest for Design Grant funding	Wednesday 19 May 2021
EOI and Design Grant funding approvals	Tuesday 1 June 2021
Best Practice workshops online with Local Authorities and Partners	Week beginning 21 June 2021
Final Expression of Interest deadline	Friday 13 August 2021
Stage 2 Application deadline	Friday 10 September 2021
Advise applicants of outcome	Friday 29 October 2021
Estimated Project Start Date	From 1 November 2021
Submission of Final claims	31 March 2023