

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund

Criteria, Conditions and Guidelines

Round 4

July 2021

CONTROL SHEET

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Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Round 4 Criteria, Conditions and Guidelines

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1. 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 Minister for Trade Tourism and Enterprise within the Finance and the Economy Department and 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 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 Visitor Management Steering 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 fourth 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.
- **Provision of a quality visitor experience** – through the provision of high-quality visitor facilities and infrastructure, leading to a positive impact on the local landscape and visitor economy. Applicants should demonstrate the commitment to place principles and a quality design, which can accommodate visitors with a wide variety of access needs and 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 addressing the issues generated as a result of the COVID outbreak.
- **A carbon conscious approach** – 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. Applicants should demonstrate their commitment to carbon consciousness, where a location reuses, repurposes and considers whole life costs retrofitting existing structures and considering the embodied carbon in place.
- **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.

2. RTIF Funding Criteria

- RTIF Round 4 is for projects which run from 1 November 2021 until 31 March 2023. All projects must be completed, and final claims received by 31 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 and 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 COVID, growth initiatives such as route development, events or increases in sector specific activity.**
- 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.
- RTIF cannot support projects if the relevant site, facilities or infrastructure that is to be developed or improved under the project are not owned by or leased to (under a long lease of at least 20 years with no break option) the applicant or one of the applicant’s public sector or community group partners in the project. In addition, the relevant site, facilities, or infrastructure must not be subject to any lease, licence or right of occupation granted in favour of any private sector business.

- RTIF cannot support projects which are led by the private sector or that will selectively benefit any particular private sector business or groups of businesses.

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. Projects should ensure that adequate provision has been allowed for distancing with regard to car parking spaces, entry and exit point and paths to and from car parks and attractions/villages etc.
Essential improvement works to paths	Paths of no more than 500m to and from car parks and scenic areas to ease access and address pressure points. These should be of a suitable width to enable distancing as required.
Scenic laybys	Scenic viewpoints and roadside viewpoints.
Camping facilities	Overnight motorhome bays with or without electrical hook up points adequately spaced to meet regulations on distancing.
Toilet provision	New or upgrades to existing toilets, where this creates additional provision and promotes Equality of access, particularly where these meet the new requirements for health and hygiene in the wake of COVID-19.
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. Support for active travel hubs will be considered where these will serve visitors as well as the local community. 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 maximum of 10% of the total construction costs where these relate to strategic and collaborative projects and covering both in house and contracted project management.
Land/Building purchase	Land purchase or in-kind land /building costs where these are accompanied by an external valuation.

Design costs	Designs costs up to £5,000 to support the development of strategic and collaborative projects receiving EOI approval. Can include in house or contracted costs. Any design costs over and above that claimed as part of the Design Grant can be included in the Stage 2 application costs.
Irrecoverable VAT	The RTIF Award is not subject to VAT. The RTIF Award will NOT 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 subsidy control legislation and will not support the commercial provision of facilities or support applications which are for the benefit of an individual or specific group of private sector businesses.
Visitor attractions	Funding new visitor attractions, heritage centres or paid visitor attractions.
Community facilities	Community facilities such as village halls, community hubs 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 such as cabling, wireless systems etc.
Maintenance or repair works	Routine maintenance 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 for buildings/land or future maintenance costs including cleaning are not eligible.
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 or project management 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 project development.
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.

3. 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 Wed 19 May 2021.

Stage 2 - Full Application

Under Round 4 applicants will have up to a maximum of 15 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, NatureScot, 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.

4. 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 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.

- **An enhanced, quality visitor experience** – through the provision of high quality design of 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 and improving access for all.
- **A responsible tourism approach** – Applicants are expected to take a responsible tourism approach to the planning, design and management of the infrastructure provision considering addressing the issues generated in a post-COVID world.
- **A carbon conscious approach** – Where a location reuses, repurposes and considers whole life costs retrofitting existing structures and considering the embodied carbon in place. Adding planting to existing hard infrastructure to support climate adaptation and carbon absorption. Successful projects should consider the cost of the entire lifecycle of a structure rather than only its initial capital cost. Applicants should consider the provision of co-ordinated networks of facilities along routes as well their integration into existing communities and settlements.
- **Effective partnerships and collaboration** – You must evidence planned engagement with local community groups, destination organisations and tourism businesses during the development of the Strategic Plan.
- **Strategic alignment** – Proposals should demonstrate how they are aligned to the recent Visitor Management Steering Group priorities, NatureScot’s Better Places Fund, HIE, SE and SOSE strategic plans and have considered the impact of the post-COVID environment.
- **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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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 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 or by contacting Lynn Hamilton, the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Manager at Lynn.Hamilton@visitscotland.com or on telephone number, 01786 459205.

You should submit your application to 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.

8. RTIF Round 4 Timetable

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

Round 4	Deadlines
Call Opens for Round 4 Expressions of Interest for Design Grant funding	Wednesday 19 May 2021
EOI and Design Grant funding approvals	Tuesday 1 June 2021
Final Expression of Interest deadline	Friday 13 August 2021
Stage 2 Application deadline	Friday 10 September 2021
Advise applicants of outcome	Wednesday 3 November 2021
Estimated Project Start Date	From 3 November 2021
Submission of final claims	31 March 2023