

# Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Criteria, Conditions and Guidelines 2018



# Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund - Criteria, Conditions and Guidelines

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of Scotland's seven key economic sectors and is especially important to our rural areas. The increasing popularity of outstanding scenic areas stimulated by marketing successes such as the North Coast 500, film tourism and the huge growth in cruise liner arrivals has led to rapid increases in visitor numbers. This has resulted in some areas, at certain times of the year, experiencing pressure on infrastructure and negative impacts on some local communities.

Many of our more remote rural areas and free natural attractions are served by narrow or even single track roads, and often lack facilities such as parking, scenic laybys and public toilets. These roads are primarily designed for regular local traffic and not suited to increased usage during peak times. Visitors are often not sufficiently experienced to drive these routes, particularly in hired campervans.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017 the First Minister announced a £6 million rural tourism infrastructure fund to address some of these concerns. A summary of her statement is provided below:

*“Scotland’s islands and rural communities attract visitors from across the globe.*

*The tourist boom that our country is enjoying is great news. It means more jobs and investment, but it can also mean pressure on transport, services and facilities – especially in rural areas. The Scottish Government is determined to help.*

*Our new £6 million rural tourism infrastructure fund will take bids from communities and work with local councils to support projects that enable even more people to enjoy Scotland, the most beautiful country in the world.”*

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund will 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.

The types of project that could be supported include parking, camping facilities, disposal points (especially for camper vans) and toilet provision.

The fund is a platform which will provide leverage of additional and focused investment, stimulate collaboration and build capacity within communities.

Successful applications must demonstrate the following:

- **An enhanced visitor experience**
- **A sustainable approach**
- **Community capacity building**
- **Effective partnerships and collaboration**
- **Project viability and deliverability**

**Please read this document if you are considering applying as it will provide key information that may affect your application.**

1. Assessment criteria
2. Applicant Eligibility
3. Eligible projects
4. Funding
5. Monitoring and evaluation
6. Recognition and acknowledgement
7. How to apply

## **1. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is designed to support sustainable, well planned, inspiring and collaborative infrastructure projects in rural areas that are experiencing increased pressure from visitor numbers.

Successful applications will meet the following objectives:

- **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 visitor economy
- **A sustainable approach** – applicants are expected to take a strategic and long term approach in their planning, use of materials, impact on the environment and legacy implications of the asset created after project completion
- **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** – 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:
  - A clear strategic rationale and proposition for the proposed activity
  - Proven experience of project management and financial administration
  - A clear timetable for procurement, site start date and expected time of completion
  - A clear delivery plan demonstrating value for money and measurable outputs
  - If successful, applicants will be required to provide a detailed budget over the period of the project

## 2. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Funding through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Programme should also meet the eligibility criteria set out below:

- Applications must be submitted by a Local Authority or National Park Authority in Scotland. A collaborative approach must be demonstrated with a strong buy-in and project support from local communities and tourism groups
- Applications demonstrating a strong focus on enhancing the visitor experience and community engagement will be prioritised
- We would expect your Delivery Plan to show a strong emphasis on quality and sustainable development practices and a fit with a local tourism plan or regional tourism strategy

## 3. ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

The following outlines activities that are **eligible** and **ineligible** through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Programme.

Activity **eligible** for support through Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund award includes: -

- Parking, scenic laybys, camping facilities and disposal points (especially for camper vans), and toilet provision. (NB the fund will be guided by European State Aid legislation and would not apply to the commercial provision of such facilities)
- Essential improvement works to paths to cope with visitor pressure or improve sustainable visitor management in the immediate area can be included in the project proposal. Other measures such as directional road signage, waymarks and improved interpretation can also be included
- The fund will also be able to support other interventions that encourage sustainable tourism, for example, recycling points and potentially enhanced access to natural attractions
- The fund will only be applicable to rural areas as defined by the Scottish Government's official Urban/Rural classification – "accessible and remote rural areas" excluding settlements above 3000 people
- Consideration will be given to sustainable, innovative, integrated projects which resolve both an immediate visitor pressure point but take account of wider area pressures
- Applicants must provide some level of match funding or resource provision from public sector, community group or private sector. This need not be direct financial input and could take the form of in-kind support, such as land provided for the development or appropriate project development and management costs absorbed by the Applicant
- There is an expectation that approved applications will need to show evidence of and commitment to on-going maintenance after project completion
- The fund will cover all capital costs and not revenue
- Where appropriate projects supported by the fund should be fully compliant with the Equality Act.

Activity **ineligible** for support through Rural Tourism Infrastructure Grant Fund award includes: -

- The purpose of the fund is to improve public infrastructure at visitor pressure points. It will not be for funding new attractions, but rather mitigate existing pressures

- 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 these areas from degenerating, as well as benefitting local communities in the area
- The Infrastructure focus should be for tourism, not community asks (i.e. village halls, playparks)
- The fund will not support the development or creation of Broadband infrastructure
- The Fund will not support the production of marketing and promotional materials, such as leaflets, web sites or social media activity
- Projects where there is either no evidence of community need/support or there are significant objections within the community
- Routine maintenance or repair of cycling and walking infrastructure – the exception to this, as outlined above, is where the creation of a new or enhanced path linked to a wider environmental improvement would be eligible
- Projects which have a negative impact on the natural heritage, including species and habitats, geology, landscapes and water courses. Advice should be sought early on from appropriate bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA
- Applications that have been previously been refused planning permission
- Major road improvement works

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.

#### 4. FUNDING

- Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund awards are available from £50,000 to a maximum of £300,000
- The Grant can provide Applicants with up to 70% of approved project activity
- Applicants must provide some level of match funding or resource provision from public sector, community group or private sector. This could be in the form of land provided for the development or project development or management costs absorbed by the Applicant
- Applications that demonstrate a higher level of match funding may be prioritised
- No limit is planned for the number of applications that can be submitted over the lifespan of the fund, however, funding decisions will take account of need throughout the country and geographic spread.
- Any underspends will have to be returned to the fund
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they have already secured the required match funding when making the application.
- No grants will be awarded retrospectively. Applicants must ensure no activity commences prior to the Grant agreement being signed
  - Please note, it is a **vital** requirement that all supporting documentation must be kept in full
  - All successful applicants should expect to be audited, at one payment point, throughout the period of contract. At this point the organisation will be required to

produce all requested supporting documentation to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Team

- The final end date that Round 2 projects need to be completed and final payments/claims made is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020

### **How funding is awarded**

Where the application includes a project design which has been judged by VisitScotland to require further design input in order to ensure that the project objectives are fulfilled, a provisional award may be allocated. This would allow the applicant to progress design works to a maximum of 10% of the overall budget applied for.

It is recognised that some projects may require either planning permission or an environmental assessment or both. To streamline the process, applications should at least have approval in principle to be considered. All applications will be expected to comply with appropriate procurement rules.

Where the decision-making panel is satisfied, based on the information provided within the application, that the project design is sufficiently advanced, that the project fulfils the programme objectives and that the project is of a suitably high quality then a full award may be allocated.

### **State Aid**

State Aid issues will be assessed on individual projects.

### **VAT**

*The applicant acknowledges that the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Award is not subject to VAT. Under no circumstances will the Award be increased, should any VAT liability arise for the applicant group, and, for the avoidance of doubt, the Award is inclusive of VAT, if any, payable thereon. It will be the responsibility of the applicant group to ensure that their treatment of VAT relative to the Award is correct.*

## **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 final evaluation report, and a full financial account reported against agreed budget.

Your Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Manager will provide a copy of the Fund Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines and will support you through this process.

## **6. RECOGNITION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

As part of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Agreement all supported projects are required to acknowledge Scottish Government support and, in all PR, undertaken as part of the project.

## 7. HOW TO APPLY

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Panel meets 2 times per year. The 2018/19 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Panel dates are:

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Panel	Application Deadlines
September 2018	The deadline for initial expressions of interest is 27 April 2018  The deadline for final application is 27 July 2018
March 2019	The deadline for initial expressions of interest is 31 October 2018  The deadline for final application is 31 January 2019

### Please note

Applicants must discuss their proposal with a member of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure team prior to making a full application well in advance of the above 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, application forms are available to download at [http://www.visitscotland.org/business\\_support/advice\\_materials/funding\\_opportunities.aspx](http://www.visitscotland.org/business_support/advice_materials/funding_opportunities.aspx) or, to request an application form contact the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund team at [RTIF@visitscotland.com](mailto:RTIF@visitscotland.com)

You will be provided with a schedule of deadlines at on-line enquiry stage. The application process takes approximately three months from initial enquiry through to consideration by the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Panel.

VisitScotland aims to notify applicants of the outcome of their application within 14 working days of the decision-making panel meeting.

Your award, will be paid in instalments against an agreed payment schedule, in line with monitoring and evaluation requirements and subject to audit procedures as previously indicated. The final instalment will be made following the submission and approval of a satisfactory final monitoring and evaluation report.