

Rural tourism Infrastructure Fund

Panel meeting,

TUESDAY 1ST OCTOBER 2019

FORTH, VisitScotland's Offices

MINUTES

Present

██████████ VisitScotland (Chair)
██████████ VisitScotland (on video link)
██████████ Scottish Government
██████████ Architecture Design Scotland
██████████ Scottish Enterprise (on conf call)
██████████ Highlands & Island Enterprise (on conf call)
██████████ Scottish Natural Heritage

In Attendance

██████████ RTIF Manager, VisitScotland

Apologies

██████████ Scottish Government
██████████ COSLA

1 Welcome and introductions (Thank you!)

RG welcomed the panel members to the meeting and thanked them for their additional time in the RTIF review process.

The new RTIF representative from COSLA was unable to make the meeting but a meeting has been scheduled for the 8th October with the RTIF Manager.

2 Conflicts of interest

██
██
██
██

3 Round 1&2 Review

RG reminded the Panel that the reason for the Review meeting was that only 2 of the 13 Round 2 projects approved in March had met their grant conditions which were based on the information supplied in the application form and signed off by the Local Authorities as accurate.

October 2019

Applicants have submitted revised applications and the content of these was summarised within the previously circulated Project Update Report. Applications for those with major changes to costs, timetable or outputs were placed on the FTP site to assist the Panel in the review process.

The Panel noted the changes to the projects as outlined in the previously circulated Project Status Report for Rounds 1 & 2.

A discussion followed regarding those projects deemed to have the most significant changes and the following were agreed:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]

- **02/22/1 Cromarty Tourism Development – Motorhome Facilities**

The need for the motorhome facilities was well documented and the match funding largely in place therefore an extension of the deadline for planning and completion of lease agreements until 31/12/19 was agreed. The changes to the toilets were approved however the Assessment Panel would like to see the reintroduction of the shower facilities which were part of the original application submission. RTIF Manager to explore options with HC and the Community with the flexibility to increase the intervention rate to the maximum if required.

• **02/22/2 Cromarty Tourism Development - Slipways**

The proposed move to a 2 phased approach to the development of the slipways constituted a significant change to the original application assessed and scored by the Panel in March. The Panel raised concerns over several issues specifically:

- 1 The question of phasing of the slipway development was not identified in the original application submitted by Highland Council on 31st January or in the subsequent revised versions of the application received on 21/2/19 and 02/07/19
- 2 The panel were not clear as to the phasing proposed, the order of the activity to be delivered and the scope of the works proposed in each of the Phases and no development plan to clarify this had been provided by the applicant.
- 3 There was a lack of clarity and evidence as to the role and financial commitment of any potential HIE funding, at this time, within a phased development.
- 4 There are a number of unresolved issues including planning. The original expected date for planning provided by Highland Council in their application submitted on 31/01/19 and the revision received on 21/02/19 was May 2019 and subsequently revised by the Council to 31st August. Given that the applicant has not submitted a planning application as of 30th September 2019, it is not clear how the applicant will achieve their own current estimated deadline of securing planning permission by 31st December 2019.
- 5 The proposed lease with the Wakelin Trust also originally projected by Highland Council to be in place by May 2019 and subsequently revised to 31st August has not been agreed as of 30th September and a Marine license application has not been submitted.
- 6 The potential issues raised by the Wakelin Trust regarding the lack of clarity on the designs and specification of the slipways particularly with respect to any impact on Crown Estates land and the costs that might be associated with this has not been addressed within the revised application.
- 7 Given the level of uncertainty regarding the condition of the slipways, there has been no clarity or evidence provided in the revised application regarding the costs for the slipway development and what costs are included in each of the phases. This was considered to be a major concern given the complexities of building on the seabed.
- 8 There is a lack of detail on the commercial operation of the Ferry and the lease arrangements between the Community Trust and the Ferry operator which the panel agreed needed further consideration

Because of these issues, the Assessment Panel concluded that given the significant degree of change to the original project application and the subsequent revisions received in February and July 2019, and the lack of certainty over the timescale for the resolution of these issues, that the original assessment and scoring of the project was no longer valid and the Panel could not continue to support the project as restated at the present time.

However, the Panel agreed that if these issues have been resolved the applicant would be welcome to resubmit a new application to the 3rd Round of RTIF in 2020

It was agreed that the RTIF manager should inform the applicant of the decision immediately as a meeting had already been arranged with the applicant and partners which was scheduled for 2nd October.

4 Reserve Projects

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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7 Round 3 Timetable

[REDACTED]

8 Campervan and Chemical Waste Disposal Points Working Group

[REDACTED]

9 AOCB

There was no other business and the meeting was adjourned.

Subject: FW: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 04 October 2019 14:45

To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]

Subject: FW: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

Hi [REDACTED]

As they threatened, Cromarty did indeed write to their MSP – see below. Ms Hyslop's office have asked for a response for her to send to Ms Forbes.

Grateful for a response in terms of why the decision was reached – obviously RTIF isn't responsible for routine maintenance, and as you stated, the timescales proposed don't fit in with the funding availability. Ideal if we can come up with a potential solution, especially with next year being the Year of Coasts and Waters and additional funding allocation for that aspect within the fund. Your note has been helpful in this regard.

[REDACTED]

Grateful for a response from VS first thing Monday, 21 October.

Many thanks

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]> On Behalf Of Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

Sent: 04 October 2019 12:59

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs <CabSecCTEA@gov.scot>; [REDACTED]

<[REDACTED]>

Subject: FW: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

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From: Kate Forbes MSP <Kate.Forbes.msp@parliament.scot>

Sent: 04 October 2019 10:01

To: Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs <CabSecCTEA@gov.scot>

Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity <CabSecTIC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for

the Rural Economy <CabSecRE@gov.scot>

Subject: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

Dear Fiona,

RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

I am writing to you on behalf of my constituents who are part of the Cromarty Community Development Trust. As you will be aware, they were successfully awarded £300,000 in the last round of funding, £200,000 of which was allocated towards their slipways project.

For context, the Cromarty to Nigg ferry is a lifeline for locals and tourists alike during the summer months. It brings many on a promoted detour off of the North Coast 500 and the A9.

The trust's vision is to ensure the slipways are fit for purpose and allow the ferry service to be improved. The current operator has expressed a desire to obtain a larger ferry in the near future, this will benefit local businesses, and provide more local jobs. To achieve this the slipways desperately need to be upgraded or Cromarty will lose its ferry altogether, and with it a lot of passing trade.

I have seen evidence from the local community demonstrating that in the summer of 2015 – when the ferry was unable to operate – 50 per cent of local businesses on both sides of the crossing said this had a significant impact on their takings.

The capacity of the current ferry is restricted to two cars and is also restricted by the tides. The length and condition of the current slipways mean that the ferry cannot operate during a low tide. Unless remedial works take place soon, the slipways will become unusable and the ferry will likely cease operation altogether.

Over the past three years the number of passengers have increased and the ferry is struggling to meet demand meaning that tourists have made the detour to Nigg or Cromarty only to find that they cannot cross or face a lengthy wait. This has at times caused significant congestion in Cromarty village.

Members of the trust and the local communities, as well as myself, were very pleased when the RTIF funding was awarded and I was particularly pleased to see Scottish Government money going directly into my constituency.

This week, the trust was informed that their RTIF funding for the slipways project was being removed. They are still awaiting the exact reasons in writing, but they were told this was due to concerns around implementation dates. There was some discussion, and representatives said that planning permission and the landowner lease should've been in place by a deadline in May. I find this absolutely astonishing, given that the RTIF funding announcement was made a month later in June. If such concerns existed, why were they not addressed at the time, and why make the public announcement?

Furthermore, having looked through their original application to the fund, it says that these prerequisites would be completed by December 2019. Having spoken to the trust at length, I understand that the works will be carried out on time as stated in that document. Why has there been such a drastic change of heart?

My constituents have been up front with Highland Council that their deadline was December 2019, and by this time planning permission and the lease would be in place. The trust's architects agree this is doable and the planning department have been primed for a quick turnaround – which they are agreeable to.

The unprecedented removal of the RTIF funding has a drastic impact upon the trust.

This will have a knock-on effect for match funding, as they were due to receive £100,000 from SSE's Beatrice fund – (£50,000 for Nigg and £50,000 for Cromarty side). Further match funding is coming from Global Energy at Nigg, and the slipway owner, John Nightingale – all tied into RTIF. This decision jeopardises around £130,000 in match funding.

Furthermore, the trust commissioned Wallace Stone in Dingwall to undertake the design and tender. They haven't had a fee estimate for the work done as yet, but suspect it will be at least £10,000 of the initial £23,000 budget. The marine licence is in preparation, design is well underway, the topography survey is done and trial pits have just been dug.

In light of this, I would urge you to overturn whatever decision has taken place locally, and ensure that the original funding will proceed as promised. Failure to do so, will leave a small community organisation in financial jeopardy, and also result in the project being, literally and metaphorically, dead in the water.

In light of the above circumstances, I would welcome your urgent intervention on the matter. I have copied in the

Cabinet Secretary for Transport and the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, as this matter also affects their respective portfolios.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kate

Kate Forbes MSP
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch

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Subject: FW: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]> On Behalf Of Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

Sent: 04 October 2019 13:09

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]> Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs
<CabSecCTEA@gov.scot>

Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

Thanks [REDACTED] – [REDACTED]

Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | T [REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 04 October 2019 13:06
To: Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs <CabSecCTEA@gov.scot>
Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

I [REDACTED] can certainly provide a response for 21 October. I know about this issue – partly it is maintenance – which the fund isn't responsible for, but also an extension, for which they weren't in a position to take forward as per the award – but they were ok for the campervan facilities. They've also raised direct with VS and HIE.

Regards

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]> On Behalf Of Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs
Sent: 04 October 2019 12:59
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs <CabSecCTEA@gov.scot>; [REDACTED]

Subject: FW: Urgent: RTIF funding removed from Cromarty to Nigg slipways project

[REDACTED] (and cc'ing [REDACTED])

Grateful if we can have a draft reply by Mon 21 Oct.

Mr Ewing wants to be kept updated so can you ensure his PO are cc'd into anything on this?

Thanks

[REDACTED]
Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs
The Scottish Government

St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | [REDACTED]

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Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity <CabSecTIC@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy <CabSecRE@gov.scot>

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Kate

Kate Forbes MSP
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch

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Subject:

FW: Cromarty Development Trust Meeting

From:**Sent:** 3 Oct 2019 10:05**To:****Cc:****Subject:** Cromarty Development Trust Meeting

Just to bring you up to date with the Cromarty Community Trust Development Trust meeting yesterday afternoon

I had informed the Council in advance of the meeting of the Assessment Panel decision but the Community insisted that the meeting went ahead.

The meeting was attended by directors of the Community Trust, the ferry operator, Stewart Wardlaw from HIE, Paul Harrington from the Community Asset Transfer Team at HIE and Highland Council.

I explained the decisions of the Panel relating to the Motorhome Facilities and the Slipways.

The Community are clearly very disappointed at the decision and have not had the time to really process this or to really direct their attention to the way forward. There was considerable talk about appeals, going to the press and politicians, FOI's, demands for the minutes of the meeting, and details about other projects and we should be prepared for this in the coming days. I will brief Leon from our side.

There are 2 issues that they raised, one, that as a Trust they have incurred costs in design etc to get where they are now and they will not be able to recoup this cost through RTIF although our guidelines clearly state that fees incurred at the applicants own risk if the project does not proceed. Secondly, the Nigg slipway has now been condemned and the Ferry cannot operate next summer without immediate repairs to the slipway with the potential loss of 4 jobs and an impact on the tourism sector and community.

Stewart Wardlaw did point out to them that the good repair of the slipway was the responsibility of the current owner of the slipways the Wakelin Trust and that the Wakelin Trust had a duty within the terms of their current lease with the Ferry operator to ensure the slipway was in good operating condition rather than RTIF.

HIE have clearly had discussions with the group about the possibility of the community purchase of the slipway but the group preferred to opt for a long term lease which has still not been progressed with the Wakelin Trust. HIE also recognised the possible complications raised by the representative of the Wakelin Trust about the Crown Estates land and the seabed. The Trust said this wasn't a problem but didn't offer any evidence of this.

Stewart Wardlaw did also point out to them that he was also confused as to the development plan for the slipways as the scenario outlined by the Community Trust last night was not the same scenario they had previously discussed with him either in terms of the order of works, or the scope of the works in phases 1 and 2. Other issues that he seemed to have raised with them already such as more detail on the future business relationship between the ferry operator and Community Trust was still outstanding.

Planning applications have not been submitted as yet and therefore there remains a very high likelihood that the Community Trust would not be in a position to achieve their own new deadline of planning approval by the December as the last North Planning Committee for HC for the year is 26th November only 8 weeks away.

There were may assurances that the Community Trust that their engineers say the project can be delivered on time and in budget but they did not offer any evidence of this.

It was left last night that the Community Trust would let me know if they wished to proceed with the motorhome facilities and Jacqui Ross, one of the Trust Directors has come back to me already saying that they would talk to their other match funders about the motorhome facilities and let me know if they were going to proceed. She has asked if there is a timescale for letting us know if they wished to go ahead with the motorhomes which I don't think we discuss specifically. I would be inclined to put a date of the 31st October on this and review it at that point but if you have an alternative timescale in mind, please let me know before I respond

I have been trying to get in touch with [REDACTED] to give him a briefing [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. I will try again today [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] you will be able to reach me on the mobile if you need any further information

Regards

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund Manager
VisitScotland
Stirling Old Town Jail
St John St
Stirling

Tel Office : [REDACTED]

Mobile : [REDACTED]

Office Hours

Monday - Thursday 9.00am – 5.30pm

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Subject:

FW: RTIF

From:

Sent: 30 September 2019 19:07

To:

Subject: RTIF

Hi

As promised, some pointers for tomorrow's meeting:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Cromarty – Motorhome project – planning not submitted as still dealing with designs (Maren Ebling involved with this project) – but match funding sorted. Asked to re include chemical waste and shower facilities. Ready to go once planning approved. Content

Cromarty – Slipways – Had proposed increasing both slipways by 10m over two phases each so 20m in total. HIE have also offered support. However not tendered. Agreed that this should be a new application to the fund for round three, with underspend factored into allocation for next year.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Tourism - Senior Policy Adviser
Scottish Government - Directorate for Culture, Tourism and Major Events

Area 2-G South
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External
Affairs
Fiona Hyslop MSP



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Ms Kate Forbes MSP
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Our ref: 2019/0029493

21 October 2019

Dear Kate

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 October regarding the Cromarty to Nigg slipways project's award of funding from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).

As you know, the Cromarty to Nigg slipways project is part of a wider initiative that included motorhome facilities that was awarded £300,000 (the maximum level of funding) in the second round of funding. We recognise that an increasing number of visitors to both Easter Ross and the Black Isle has been encouraged by the success of the North Coast 500, and that the existing historic ferry linkage offers a visitors an alternative opportunity to travel between these two communities, benefitting businesses on both sides.

RTIF is administered by VisitScotland on behalf of the Scottish Government. VisitScotland established an independent panel for the purpose of assessing applications to the fund. This panel, chaired by VisitScotland, is made up of representatives of COSLA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, Architecture Design Scotland and the Scottish Government's Tourism team.

Applications for funding are submitted by Local Authorities and in this case the applicant was the Highland Council. The Council signed off the application in the knowledge that they would be responsible for ensuring the criteria they had agreed to would be met. VisitScotland granted an award with a number of conditions which were outlined to the Council who are responsible for engagement with the Trust who are delivering the project effectively on their behalf.

In light of concerns that the criteria were not going to be met and to ensure the protection of public funds, the panel determined to reassess the award.

I can now confirm that the chair of the panel, Riddell Graham, Director of Industry and Destination Development at VisitScotland, has written to the Highland Council, informing them that the panel has agreed an extension to this project. This has been undertaken

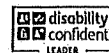
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based on a commitment from the Council to undertake a more proactive role with this project to ensure its completion.

Subject to clarity around phasing, funding and commercial operations of the ferry, the panel has agreed to extend the deadline for resolution of all outstanding matters until 28 February. This includes confirmation of match funding, relevant permissions, and a lease agreement by that date.

I share the panel's welcome of the positive approach being taken by the Council and its commitment to work with the Trust in progressing these matters.

*Kind regards
Fiona Hyslop*

Fiona Hyslop

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Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External
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Fiona Hyslop MSP



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T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Cllr Derek Loudon
The Highland Council

By email – LoudenDW@aol.com

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Thank you for your correspondence of 9 October to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity regarding issues around Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) support to the Cromarty and Nigg slipway. As responsibility for this fund lies within my portfolio, I am replying.

The Cromarty to Nigg slipways project is part of a wider initiative that included motorhome facilities that was awarded £300,000 (the maximum level of funding) in the second round of funding. We recognise that an increasing number of visitor's to both Easter Ross and the Black Isle has been encouraged by the success of the North Coast 500, and that the existing historic ferry linkage offers a visitors an alternative opportunity to travel between these two communities, benefitting businesses on both sides.

RTIF is administered by VisitScotland on behalf of the Scottish Government. VisitScotland established an independent panel for the purpose of assessing applications to the fund. This panel, chaired by VisitScotland, is made up of representatives of COSLA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, Architecture Design Scotland and the Scottish Government's Tourism team.

Applications for funding are submitted by Local Authorities and in this case the applicant was the Highland Council. The Council signed off the application in the knowledge that they would be responsible for ensuring the criteria they had agreed to would be met. VisitScotland granted an award with a number of conditions which were outlined to the Council who are responsible for engagement with the Trust who are delivering the project effectively on their behalf.

In light of concerns that the criteria were not going to be met and to ensure the protection of public funds, the panel determined a need to reassess the award.

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I can now confirm that the chair of the panel, Riddell Graham, Director of Industry and Destination Development at VisitScotland, who you have previously been in correspondence with, has written to the Highland Council, informing them that the panel has agreed an extension to this project. This has been undertaken based on a commitment from the Council to undertake a more proactive role with this project to ensure its completion. The relevant official within the Council who can advise you on their intended support is Colin Simpson.

Subject to receiving clarity from the Council around a number of remaining issues, the panel has agreed to extend the deadline for resolution of all outstanding matters until 28 February 2020.

I share the panel's welcome of the positive approach being taken by the Council and its commitment to work with the Trust in progressing these matters.

Fiona Hyslop

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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
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