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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

23 January 2024

## Cabinet

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>North Ayrshire Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans - Mainland and Islands</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	This report seeks approval for Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans for the North Ayrshire Mainland and Islands, to support funding applications for projects which help manage infrastructure relating to domestic tourism.
<b>Recommendation:</b>	It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Mainland and draft Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Islands (attached as Appendices 1 and 2).

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval of the draft Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Mainland and draft Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Islands (STIDPs). These Plans expand on the strategic approach to managing the impact of tourism demonstrated in North Ayrshire Council's Visitor Management Plans, but take a longer-term view of potential projects, considering ongoing impacts of a post-pandemic increase in visitors, changes in behaviour, and the impact on our infrastructure and communities. STID Plans are vital to support applications to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund managed by VisitScotland.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The visitor economy is an important sector of North Ayrshire's economy. In 2022, there were 2.9m visitor days with an economic impact of £230m, supporting 3,391 full time jobs. The impact of tourism is not just economic - there are a range of impacts on our communities, our environment and our infrastructure assets. Our Visitor Management Plan (VMP) was first introduced in 2022 and revised in 2023 to address short-term actions and the VMP identified a need for a longer-term plan to consider priorities for investment. The STID Plans take a longer-term approach.
- 2.2 Visit Scotland manages the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), which provides funding for projects which address existing or anticipated visitor pressure points, meet a strategic need, provide a quality visitor experience, take a responsible tourism approach and have an environmental and community focus. RTIF funding is only available to local authorities and national parks and is only applicable to projects identified in Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans.

- 2.3 North Ayrshire Council's Visitor Management Plans demonstrated our commitment to provision of visitor services and helped us to secure funding to develop STID Plans for our Mainland and Islands, which in turn will enable applications to future rounds of RTIF grants and other potential funding sources. RTIF funding has eligibility criteria, including geographic restrictions. Projects that could be supported include parking, motorhome facilities (including disposal points), viewpoints, paths, toilet provision and EV and e-bike charge points.
- 2.4 Appendices 1 and 2 attached to this report present our first STID Plans for the Mainland and Islands. These plans will be reviewed regularly and updated annually. The STID Plans serve as tools to apply for RTIF and other funding, and illustrate short, medium and longer-term plans to improve visitor infrastructure and manage the challenges of increased footfall.
- 2.5 The process of preparing the plans included a review of the actions identified in the NAC Visitor Management Plans, consultation with industry representatives, workshops and interviews with officers and a review of relevant documents, strategies and publications, both internal and external, including the national tourism strategy, 'Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future' and the Regional 'Ayrshire and Our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy'. The process has been overseen by a member/officer forum to guide development.
- 2.6 The STID plans identify priority projects for the initial RTIF funding applications. Some recurring themes have been identified relating to 'hotspots' – such as the amount of motorhomes parked on streets and the conflict with other users. Full RTIF grant applications require projects which are shovel-ready, complete with planning. RTIF design grants are available at any time for up to £20k, at a 100% intervention rate, to explore projects to the planning stage, ready for the main RTIF grants. Main RTIF grants can only be applied for when a funding round is open and can be for project values of £200-£750k at a 75% intervention rate.
- 2.7 In terms of each of the Plans, the member/officer Tourism Forum identified the initial priority on both the Mainland and the Islands as the management of motorhomes. North Ayrshire has experienced a huge influx of motorhomes since the pandemic, which has created pressure points in those communities most impacted. Motorhomes can bring significant economic benefit, however North Ayrshire has a lack of dedicated parking and facilities. Work is underway on an RTIF design grant application to support the development of motorhome provision, to realise economic benefits, as well as improving visitor experience, across North Ayrshire, which will relieve pressure on the tourism 'hotspots' and in our communities, as well as attracting new visitors.
- 2.8 It should be noted that the content of STID plans is intended to set out a holistic view of potential areas for investment in facilities to benefit the visitor economy. While the relationship to RIF funding is specifically highlighted, given the link established between STID and RTIF by VisitScotland, the plans provide a flexibility and contains items that may not be eligible for RTIF funds because there may be other funding sources in future that support delivery. In particular it is worth noting North Ayrshire Council's response to the national consultation on a visitor levy recognises the benefit that a levy could bring in supporting place-based investment, subject to any scheme being viable and operationally supported.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the draft North Ayrshire Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Mainland and draft Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan – Islands (attached as Appendices 1 and 2).

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans exist as a mechanism to support future RTIF and other grant applications. RTIF offers design grants of up to £20k which are awarded at a 100% intervention rate and more than one can be applied for at a time. Full RTIF grants are awarded at a 75% intervention rate, with a requirement for 25% match funding. This match funding can be from other funding sources or set against officer time and in-kind services. The minimum RTIF full grant is £150k against a £200k project.

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 Successful application for either an RTIF design grant or RTIF full grant will require officer time to manage the projects.

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 Any grant agreements will be reviewed by Legal Services.

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 It is predicted that the impact of the Plans will have generally positive equality and social impacts.

#### **Climate Change and Carbon**

- 4.5 The proposals will have a positive impact on environmental resources.

#### **Key Priorities**

- 4.6 The proposals support the delivery of Council Plan priorities – in particular, “North Ayrshire has an inclusive, growing and enterprising economy” and “North Ayrshire is a vibrant, welcoming and attractive environment”. The proposals also support the ambitions of the national tourism strategy, ‘Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future’ and the Regional ‘Ayrshire and Our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy’.

#### **Community Wealth Building**

- 4.7 The proposals in the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans support the delivery of the Council’s Community Wealth Building strategy.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The content of the STID Plans has been developed and informed by engagement with the member/officer Tourism Forum, officers and businesses. The Tourism Forum exists to oversee strategic tourism matters and there will be agreed regular updates on activity via comms channels.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON  
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **Neale McIlvanney, Interim Head of Service, (Growth, Investment and Employability)** on email - [nealemcilvanney@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:nealemcilvanney@north-ayrshire.gov.uk).

## **Background Papers**

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North Ayrshire Council  
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

## **STRATEGIC TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**North Ayrshire - Mainland**

**7<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

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# Introduction

Home to 134,000<sup>1</sup> people, North Ayrshire covers an area of 340 square miles and along with the mainland includes the islands of Arran, Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae. Tourism is an important sector in North Ayrshire attracting over 1.4m visitors annually over 2.9m visitor days<sup>2</sup>. The visitor economy supports 3,400 jobs and £230m in economic impact<sup>2</sup> from a wide range of tourism, hospitality, recreation, and leisure businesses.

In order to grow and further enhance North Ayrshire's reputation as a responsible and well-managed tourist destination with strong environmental values, this Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan lays out the case and justification for infrastructure investment within the mainland area of North Ayrshire. It includes an analysis of the effects of recent visitor pressures on the environment, infrastructure, and communities, especially in rural and coastal areas, as well as the efforts made to lessen those pressures.

North Ayrshire Council (NAC) has been leading the effort with the assistance of partner organisations. In addition, this Plan includes a series of proposed capital and revenue investments to address visitor growth and alleviate pressure on rural communities. This document aims to contribute to the long-term strategy for improving the experience of visitors to North Ayrshire, its unique tourism characteristics, as well as their impact on the surrounding environment, community, and businesses. The Plan was developed in consultation with North Ayrshire Council and tourism stakeholders, alongside comparator studies and desk research. A separate Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan has been prepared for the islands of Arran and Great Cumbrae.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland, Mid 2021 Population Estimate

<sup>2</sup> Source: STEAM 2022

# Background

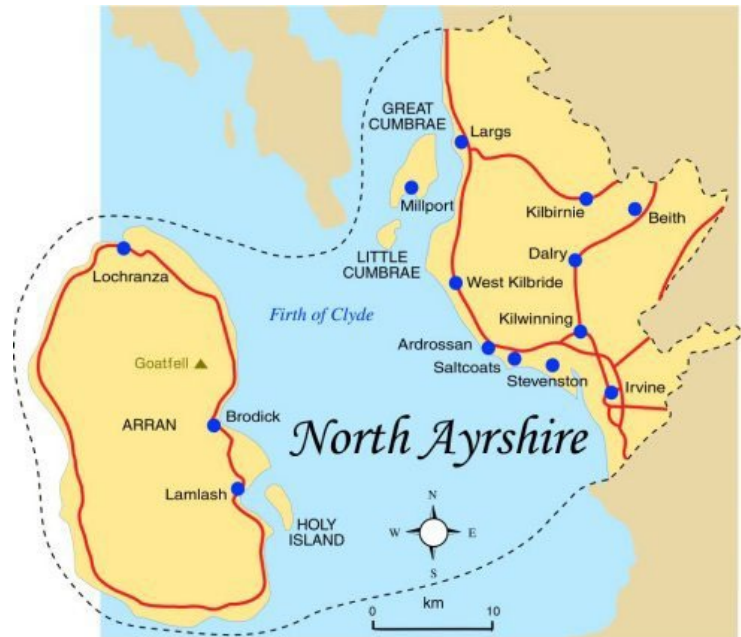
Tourism is an important sector in North Ayrshire attracting over 1.4m visitors annually providing employment and expenditure into a wide range of tourism, hospitality, recreation, and leisure businesses.

North Ayrshire is a key destination attracting domestic and overseas visitors. In order to support the sector, maximise its potential and manage visitors effectively, North Ayrshire Council (NAC) is seeking investment to develop modern, effective and sustainable visitor infrastructure. NAC has developed this Strategic Tourism

Infrastructure Development Plan

to attract investment and funding from VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) and other funding streams, to improve visitor management over the next 5-7 years.

VisitScotland's RTIF plays a crucial role in ensuring the delivery of NAC plans and attracting investment into visitor infrastructure. NAC aims to seek long-term funding support from RTIF and therefore now requires a strategic investment plan to meet this goal. The purpose of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (STIDP) is to provide medium-to-long-term tourism infrastructure solutions to complement North Ayrshire's Visitor Management Plans, which include smaller-scale and shorter-term project objectives. While some projects are expected to be delivered by the Council, the Plan also includes a number of projects likely to be taken forward by partner agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) or communities.





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## What is the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund?

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) was established by the Scottish Government and the Fund is managed by VisitScotland on its behalf. RTIF is designed to support collaborative projects which focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that are facing pressure on their infrastructure and communities as a result of visitor numbers.

To enable a more strategic approach to visitor infrastructure development and greater alignment with the objectives of Scotland Outlook 2030 and the new National Strategy for Economic Development, RTIF has supported the development of a number of Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans in rural areas across Scotland. The Strategic Infrastructure Plans will inform the priorities for RTIF over the next three to five years.

Only Local Authorities and National Park Authorities can apply for RTIF funding. The types of projects that could be supported include parking, motorhome facilities (including disposal points), viewpoints, paths, toilet provision and EV and e-bike charge points.

Successful applications support the objectives of the national tourism strategy “Scotland Outlook 2030” and the Scottish Government's “National Strategy for Economic Development”. Projects will also demonstrate the following:

- Evidence that the project will address an existing or anticipated visitor pressure point.
- That a strategic need is met or a gap is addressed by the actions proposed.
- Provide a quality visitor experience.
- Will take a responsible tourism approach to the planning, design, building and management of the infrastructure provision.
- That an environmental and community focus is applied to the development.
- Provide evidence of engagement with local community groups, destination organisations and tourism businesses, demonstrating partnership working.

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# Tourism and Market Trends

With fertile agricultural land, sandy beaches and 225km of dramatic coastline across mainland and islands, North Ayrshire has a rich landscape which justifies its position as one of Scotland's most sought-after tourism locations. The beaches and scenery of North Ayrshire provide a natural setting for a variety of tourism activities. Alongside over 30 castles, the area is home to world-class golf facilities that have hosted the Scottish Open. For nearly a century, it has been a major water sports destination, with seven high-quality sailing clubs. Largs Yacht Haven has over 700 berths and a range of services and facilities for visitors and Yacht Haven and Largs Sailing Club host many national and international sailing events.

Reflecting the coastal nature of the area, Irvine is home to the Scottish Maritime Museum which attracts over 70,000 visitors a year, whilst Largs is home to the annual Viking Festival which draws tens of thousands of visitors. North Ayrshire also offers the opportunity to eat and drink local, award-winning food which is produced throughout the area.

Tourism is a significant contributor to the regional economy. Based on the 2022 STEAM reports North Ayrshire Local Authority had 1.4 million visitors over 2.9 million visitor days. This generated £173.1m in direct expenditure. The visitor economy is worth £230m in economic impact and supports 2,648 direct full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs and 3,391 FTE jobs in total tourism employment.

Mainland North Ayrshire (excluding Arran and Cumbrae) saw 960,800 visitors in 2022 (STEAM) over 1.9m visitor days, spending £109.7m. Direct tourism employment within Mainland North Ayrshire is 1,445 FTE and 1,902 FTE total employment. The visitor economy is worth £144.5m in economic impact.

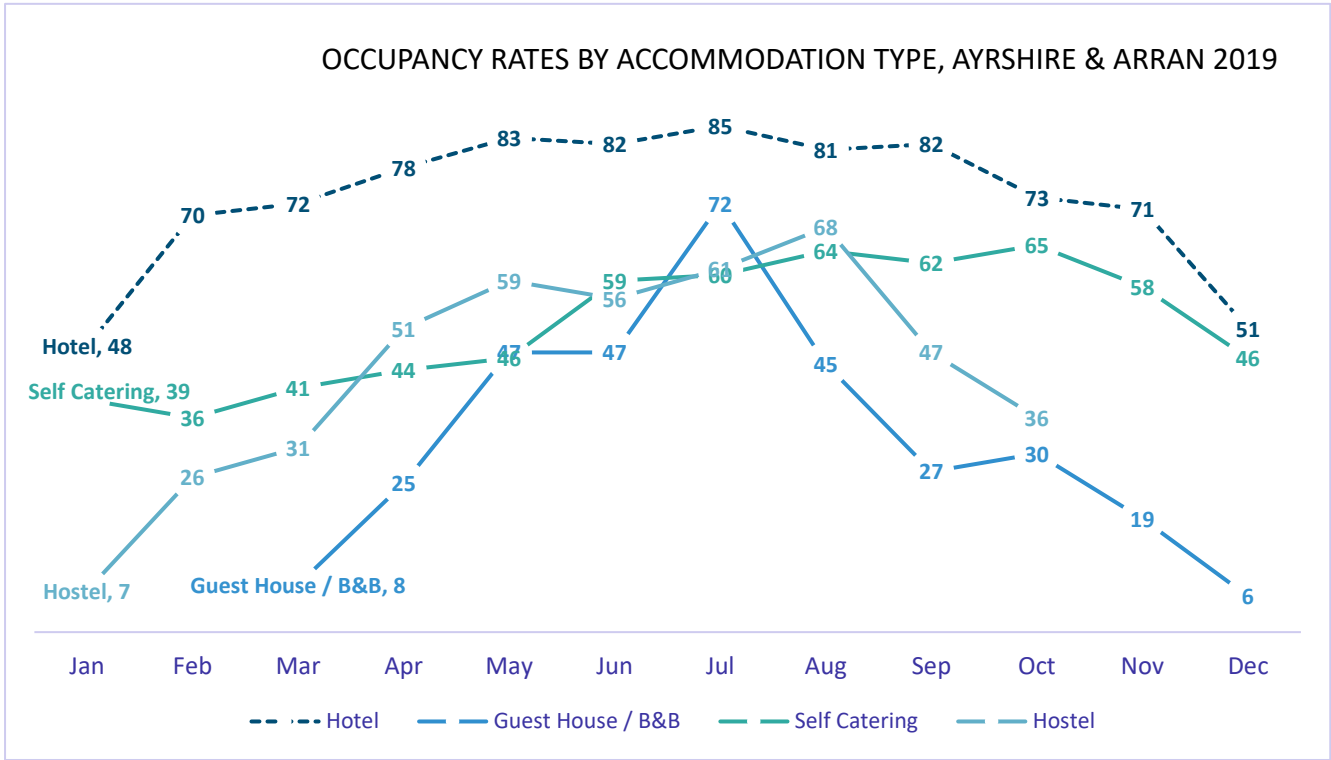
Overnight and International visitors are a vital part of tourism demand with pre-pandemic "staying visitors" having steadily increased year on year between 2009-2019. Post pandemic visitor numbers have steadily recovered. Similar to the day visitor profile, overnight visitors are principally domestic, with a mix of Scots residents and the rest of the

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UK. Self-catering is a popular accommodation type and is represented by short-term lets, holiday parks and numerous camping and caravan sites. International visitors, while smaller in number to the region, are principally represented by the main inbound markets to Scotland (USA, Germany and France) with key ancestral and diaspora markets also a major contributor to the international visitor profile (Australia and Canada).

There was an overall change in behaviour during and following the pandemic which looks set to continue. Outdoor activities and the spaces North Ayrshire has to offer have a renewed appeal to visitors and residents and popular destinations continue to experience strong demand for parking, motorhome accommodation, public conveniences, an increase in littering, waste and antisocial behaviour and queuing for ferries at peak times. While overseas visitor numbers have not yet quite returned to pre-pandemic levels, national and local visitors who discovered what North Ayrshire has to offer are continuing to make return visits. Uncertainty over extreme weather overseas due to climate change also makes staycations more attractive. The increase in use of North Ayrshire spaces by both residents and visitors has put an additional burden on Council services and on our tourism infrastructure and has had an impact on communities in ‘honeypot’ locations.

Capacity and seasonality are key factors in terms of tourism investment. Mainland North Ayrshire (and the islands of Arran and Cumbrae) are subject to higher overnight visitor numbers in the summer than in winter. The following chart shows occupancy rates across the wider Ayrshire and Arran area, with pre-pandemic occupancy rates.



Source: VisitScotland Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey, 2019

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# Strategic Priorities

Strategic Development within North Ayrshire is influenced by a number of strategic and policy areas. These include:

- North Ayrshire Council Visitor Management Plan 2023
- North Ayrshire Council Local Development Plan 2019
- Ayrshire & Arran Visitor Economy Leadership Group “Ayrshire & Our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy” 2023
- North Ayrshire Council Community Wealth Building Strategy
- The Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy 2024-2027
- Regeneration Delivery Plan 2023/24

The overarching objectives of these plans are the sustainable growth of the economy and supporting jobs and communities in a responsible way to protect the environment. Among the objectives of the North Ayrshire Council Visitor Management Plan 2023 are for example:

- Encouraging sustainable visitor patterns by promoting our tourism assets and potential across all of North Ayrshire, including our inland localities
- Establishing North Ayrshire as a leading responsible tourism destination in Scotland.
- Increasing the impact and benefit of tourism across North Ayrshire’s communities.
- Making North Ayrshire a digitally discoverable and enabled destination.

## Stakeholder Prioritisation

Following engagement with a range of stakeholders on the Mainland of North Ayrshire to understand views on the development of visitor infrastructure within the area, the following priorities were identified in terms of developing visitor infrastructure on the Mainland.

- Motorhome management

- Improvements to car parking infrastructure
- Public Transport
- Improvements to roads infrastructure
- Improvements to cycling infrastructure (bike storage, service points, cycle paths).
- Visitor amenities including toilet Facilities

These priorities encompass areas including active travel facilities and electric vehicle charging for cars and bikes.

Motorhome facilities were of particular concern due to the rapid growth of this aspect of tourism product development. It was therefore determined that when considering visitor infrastructure for the respondent's area of operation in North Ayrshire the top priorities were:

- Developing sustainable solutions to manage "under pressure" destinations (experiencing negative impacts)
- Empowering landowners, land managers, businesses, communities and visitors to deliver collaborative plans and activities
- Solutions providing a source of visitor-generated income to manage infrastructure/services (e.g. cost recovery models)
- Projects to engage communities in visitor experience improvements (e.g. volunteering, cultural engagement)
- Activities aligned with National Visitor Management strategies e.g. reducing seasonality / regional pressures / environmental targets

To frame the requirements for investment within North Ayrshire the stakeholder engagement identified the following challenges and opportunities for tourism within the area.

#### **Current challenges facing tourism in North Ayrshire**

- Staff availability
- Public Transport
- Lack of motorhome facilities

- Inflation, energy, and operating costs
- Waste Management
- Parking
- Toilets
- Marketing
- Community backlash against visitors
- Accommodation Availability
- Attracting Overnight Visitors
- Attracting International Visitor Markets

### **Current opportunities for tourism in North Ayrshire**

- Adventure Tourism
- Shift to sustainable behaviours
- Coastal Environment
- Industrial Heritage
- Local Community Improvement Plans
- Staycations
- Extending seasons
- Active Travel
- Marine Tourism
- Proximity to key markets (domestic and international)

Looking more broadly at opportunities and challenges in relation to tourism delivery for North Ayrshire, the following responses were provided through stakeholders:

### **Biggest challenges for tourism to 2025**

- Visitor Management
- Strategic Leadership
- Staffing
- Increased cost of operation
- Economy
- Domestic market going overseas
- Retaining market share
- Antisocial tourism behaviour

### **Biggest Opportunities to 2025**

- Regeneration of communities
- Capitalise on new developments
- Increased Accessibility to Islands
- Provision of pre-visit information
- Access for all
- Specialising in marine and outdoor tourism
- Increasing visitors from Central Belt
- Inter-regional collaboration

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## Funding and Legislation Landscape

National and local strategies determine the parameters within which tourism infrastructure development will be identified and prioritised. It should be noted that there are strategic levers which will frame the implementation of the infrastructure development.

National and Local Government policy may provide constraints and opportunities for investment within the tourism sector. Transient Visitor Levy and the Short-term Let legislation have a direct impact on tourism in North Ayrshire and Scotland more broadly. While there may be increased bureaucracy for businesses, the object of the respective policies is to address negative elements of tourism expansion while potentially generating new funding sources to support tourism infrastructure projects. Other policies directly influencing tourism include The Land Reform Act, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and the Climate Change Act 2019.

Funding is available from a number of sources. Principal among these is the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF). The RTIF was established by the Scottish Government and the Fund is managed by VisitScotland on its behalf. RTIF design grants of up to £20k are awarded at a 100% intervention rate and more than one can be applied for at a time. Full RTIF grants are awarded at a 75% intervention rate, with a requirement for 25% match funding. This match funding can be from other funding sources and/or set against officer time and in-kind services. The minimum RTIF full grant is £150k against a £200k project.

To enable a more strategic approach to visitor infrastructure development and greater alignment with the objectives of Scotland Outlook 2030 and the new National Strategy for Economic Development, RTIF supported the development of Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans in rural areas across Scotland including North Ayrshire. These Strategic Infrastructure Plans will inform the priorities for RTIF over the next three to five years.

Other investment funds which may influence the tourism investment in North Ayrshire may include the NatureScot Better Places Fund, which provides support for the



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employment of seasonal rangers and visitor operations posts to engage with the public and help manage visitor numbers, pressures on communities and antisocial behaviours in “hot spot” locations across Scotland. Civtech is another pathway for the public sector to resolve identified problems through collaboration with technology innovators.

The Ayrshire Growth Deal is a major investment fund and North Ayrshire Council manages the delivery of the Tourism Programme for Ayrshire, investing in the regeneration of Irvine Harbourside and improving marine infrastructure on Arran and Great Cumbrae.

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# Prioritised Regional Infrastructure Plans

The approach for prioritised infrastructure development is based on a framework to identify the strategic deliverable goals which were identified within the analysis of stakeholder engagement, local plans and visitor management priorities. These are:

- **Economic** – projects which will enhance the visitor economy, supporting businesses and jobs by the provision of infrastructure and services that will attract and retain visitors to a destination in a responsible manner.
- **Environmental** – relating to sustainable benefits to the natural or built environment. It is also associated with waste management and health and well-being.
- **Community** – Tourism has been recognised as having an impact both positive and negative on residents of destinations. Community engagement was highlighted in the stakeholder survey as a priority area. Infrastructure which encourages responsible tourism and minimises the impact on residents while increasing visitors' dwell time is encouraged.
- **Education** – Services and infrastructure that inform and educate visitors on responsible and sustainable tourism, that add dimension to a visit through storytelling or information and that distribute visitors away from areas of tourism congestion.

**Priority Locality Plans** provided here are for specific mainland areas, and provide details of development and additional information relevant to that area. The areas identified are:

- **Mainland South** – Three Towns (Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Stevenston), Kilwinning and Irvine
- **Mainland Inland** - Garnock Valley (Beith, Dalry, Kilbirnie)
- **Mainland North** – North Coast (Largs, Fairlie, Skelmorlie and West Kilbride)

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## **Mainland South – Three Towns, Irvine and Kilwinning**

### **Background**

Located in the south and on the coast of the mainland, the towns of Ardrossan, Saltcoats, and Stevenston (sometimes referred to as the Three Towns) provide the main transport connections to Arran from Ardrossan harbour. Having beaches, cultural and historic heritage and a marina at Ardrossan, the location benefits from a range of activities for visitors and with key public transport routes within close proximity to each of the towns beaches. To the south and east are the main urban locations of Irvine and Kilwinning, which are an important tourism draw for North Ayrshire. The historic Kilwinning Abbey is located within the centre of the town, whilst between Kilwinning and Irvine is Eglinton Park and the remains of Eglinton Castle. Irvine, once a Royal Burgh and New Town has an historic harbourside with Beach Park area and site of the former Magnum Leisure Centre.

### **Pressures**

The area, while boasting a range of activities and facilities has suffered under-investment due to an historic decline in the industrial infrastructure. An increase in motorhome visitors has led to motorhome parking in prime and congested areas.

### **Mainland South Infrastructure Priorities**

The beaches, transport infrastructure and local heritage are the main assets of the area. Visitor observations find that beach cleaning and waste management are vital. The extensive local historical and cultural heritage and the industrial past of the area would lend themselves to self-guided tours and interpretation. Recent community led improvements at Stevenston Beach and Ardrossan South Beach have enhanced local facilities. Improvements required to the quality of the retail areas are also noted by visitors. Motorhome provision away from congested areas would de-conflict parking.

## **Mainland Inland – Garnock Valley**

### **Background**

Garnock Valley is an area in the northern part of North Ayrshire, Scotland, adjoining Renfrewshire. The region includes the towns of Beith, Dalry, and Kilbirnie, and some smaller villages such as Gateside, Barrmill, Longbar and Glengarnock; with a combined

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population of around 20,000. The region is anchored by the presence of Clyde Muirheil Regional Park. Garnock Valley represents a different side of the region, being inland and dominated by rural offerings. The Lochshore Park Hub, completed in 2022, is set within the wider Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and has a range of amenities in a park setting.

### **Pressures**

The issues to be identified in this area relate to visitor management. This includes the provision of parking, toilets and facilities for outdoor activities. The Lochshore Park Hub, requires further investment to address some challenges with antisocial behaviour and motorhome waste disposal. Facilities are necessary to enhance visitor experience including access to changing facilities and improvements in public transport and active travel to meet the sustainable and net zero priorities.

### **Garnock Valley Infrastructure Priorities**

The area is a hub for outdoor activity and heritage attractions and would benefit from facilities to support these activities. There is little provision for motorhomes, with informal use of some spaces, particularly at Lochshore, resulting in motorhome waste being disposed of inappropriately. There is an opportunity to create a welcoming and practical space for motorhomes, to drive tourism into the area and to retain visitors for longer.

## **Mainland North – North Coast**

### **Background**

Encompassing the locations of Largs, Fairlie, Portencross and West Kilbride, this part of North Ayrshire has a broad range of attractions for visitors, with well-regarded beaches and heritage attractions including Largs shorefront and the Vikingar visitor facility, Largs Marina, Fairlie Marina, the West Kilbride Craft Town and Portencross Castle. The area hosts several events including the Viking Festival, national sailing events and music festivals. Ferries leave from Largs to Cumbrae where Millport is a key destination.

### **Pressures**

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The area is a popular day trip location due to its accessibility from the Central Belt. Attracting visitors to stay longer and providing greater visitor spend in the area is a key action. Visitor comments praise the parking and cleanliness of the beaches, however improvements could be made to beach amenities, to provide water, outdoor showering, BBQ areas and additional picnic benches. Toilet access and connectivity of more remote areas to facilities are also mentioned.

Largs can become very congested, particularly around the ferry terminal, and motorhome parking in the area adds to the congestion. With the ongoing increase in motorhome visitors to the area, motorhome parking and pitches for overnight stays, located away from the busy town centre, would be a major asset and reduce the pressures at the ferry terminal. Walking routes, EV charging, signage and resting points add an extra dimension to the coast and outdoor activity experiences.

### **Mainland North Infrastructure Priorities**

Similar to the South Coast, the beach, transport infrastructure and local heritage are the main assets of the area. Public toilet provision, motorhome facilities and strategic waste disposal points and destination signage are recognised as beneficial investments for the area. Visitor dispersal through smart traffic management and car parking / electric vehicle charging are also seen as promoting responsible tourism priorities.

# Action Plan

The STIDP North Ayrshire Mainland Action Plan was created to facilitate a collaborative partnership approach for the implementation of the area's strategic tourism goals. It considers projects of all sizes and is based on variable timescales for investment based on prioritisation with the Visitor Management Plan, Local Plan and budgetary constraints.

Cost indicators have been determined with project owners coordinating the ongoing finance strategy and investigating any acceptable funding possibilities as they occur. The funding will be a combination of Scottish Government, Local Authority, commercial investment and community funding, and will cover both capital and revenue operations.

Key and Potential Partners:	Timescales:
North Ayrshire Council (NAC)	ST – Short Term (2023 – 2025)
Scottish Government	MT – Medium Term (2025 – 2028)
UK Government	LT – Long Term (2028 – 2035)
Community Partnerships / Local Landowners	TBD – To Be Determined
CalMac Ferries	DNK – Not known at this time
Destination Management Organisations	
Development Trusts and Community Groups	
Street Scene (Environmental Volunteering)	
Censis / National Innovation Centres	
Heritage Groups	
Scottish Enterprise	
VisitScotland	
RSPB	
Ayrshire Growth Deal	
NatureScot	
Historic Environment Scotland	
Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park	

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
PRIORITY PROJECT – MOTORHOME FACILITIES AND PARKING MANAGEMENT								
Motorhome Provision	Across North Ayrshire	NAC, Community Groups	ST	£20k	None	Identification of suitable areas and levels of facilities required to relieve pressure caused by unregulated motorhome parking with a cost-recovery model where appropriate. To include black waste disposal at key locations.	Development of costed plans ready for project investment	RTIF Design Grant
				£300k (Ayrshire-wide)	TBD	Creation of a network of facilities across North Ayrshire.	Provision of services, reduced littering and congestion, dispersal of visitors from hotspots. Increased local spend.	RTIF Grant
Lochshore Motorhome facilities	Lochshore, Kilbirnie	NAC, Scottish Enterprise, N. Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership	ST	Included in the above	Local Plan / Part of Redevelopment of former Glengarnock Steelworks	Motorhome provision in redeveloped parklands. Land Identification, utilities, waste management.	Enhancing ongoing regeneration for leisure and recreation location.	Included in the above project
Eglington Park Camping	Eglington Park, Kilwinning	NAC	MT	Included in the above	Existing Site	Provision of utilities, waste management, and toilet upgrades primarily for motorhomes	Contribute to visitor management and alleviate pressures	Included in the above project
Toilet Upgrades for motorhome waste disposal	Region Wide	Community	MT	TBD	None	Identify and Upgrade Toilet provision within the region	Additional facilities for motorhome waste disposal and servicing points	Included in the above project
Geilsland Tourism Infrastructure Development	Beith	Beith Community Development Trust	ST	TBD	None	Investment in next stage of Geilsland TBC, potential motorhome site, EV charging	Additional motorhome facilities	May be included in the above project TBC

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
EV Charging Points in Car Park Irvine Waterfront	Irvine Great Harbour	Growth Deal	ST / MT	Approximately £1500 to £2200 per charging point		EV Charging in Car Park	Sustainability	RTIF / Growth Deal
Clyde Muirshiel Country Park Car Park Management	Clyde Muirshiel Country Park	Country Park	MT	Up to £80K		Parking Management	Visitor Management / Community Support	RTIF
TRANSPORT, ROUTES, PATHS, TRAILS and ACTIVE TRAVEL								
Ardrossan Low Carbon Hub implementation / Ayrshire Coastal Path Development	Ardrossan	NAC	MT	TBD ERDF Low Carbon Travel and Transport Challenge Fund	Detailed in Visitor Management Plan	Delivery of the Ardrossan Low Carbon includes North Shore Coastal Path; Ardrossan Harbour active travel link; and electric vehicle and e-bike charging hubs at both locations.	Delivery of net Zero and Sustainable Tourism	RTIF
Lochshore Development	Kilbirnie Loch	NAC Community Planning Partnership Scottish Enterprise	LT	TBD	As per the Community Planning Partnership consultation	Development of former Glengarnock Steelworks and covers around 250 hectares, including Kilbirnie Loch in to a parkland destination with a focus on play	Regeneration and provision of visitor services.	NAC / RTIF Design Grant
Development of Lynn Glen	Dalry	NAC Community Groups	LT	£50K - £100K		Provision of Interpretation, Trail and Path Upgrades to create an attraction hub	Regeneration and Visitor Distribution	NAC / RTIF
Water Access	Largs Harbour	Community Interest	MT	Up to £75k		Identification of locations, project leads and management	Attract visitors, and additional facilities. Enable water access and coming ashore from moored boats.	RTIF



PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Slipway & Water Access	Irvine Great Harbour	Growth Deal	MT	TBD – as per the Growth Deal Plan		Upgrade and improvement of facilities and increasing access.	Water Access	AGD
Brisbane Glen Road Passing Places and viewpoints	Coig Route / Largs	NAC	MT	TBD	None – Speculative	The project would be to identify landowner permission to provide passing places and create parking and viewpoints.	Improve traffic flow on tourist routes.	RTIF Design Grant
Play Facilities (throughout North Ayrshire)	Kilwinning, Largs, Saltcoats and Lochshore Park	Place Framework Pilots	ST	£1.096m	Regeneration Delivery Plan 2023/24	Approval of the delivery plan for the 2022/23 £1.096m allocation from the PBIP including implementation of the Place Framework pilots in Kilwinning, Largs and Saltcoats and Lochshore Park play.		Place-Based Investment Programme (PBIP)
HERITAGE, INTERPRETATION and TRAILS								
River Walk	Garnock Valley	GVLP Garnock Valley	ST	TBD	Proposed Development	Enhanced river walk proposed in local plan to be specified and requirements defined.	Improve community and visitor facilities. Improve biodiversity opportunities.	RTIF Design Grant
Seating, Interpretation, Viewpoints	Irvine Great Harbour	Heritage & Activity Groups	ST / MT	TBD – as per the Growth Deal Plan		Provision of a range of visitor street furniture/interpretation. Public washing facility for Dogs & equipment (paddleboards)		AGD
Heritage Interpretation	Irvine Harbour	Heritage Group / NAC	ST / MT	Up to £30K to £50K		Heritage promotion within the region with a local connection to D-Day (WW2)	Promotion of under-utilised local connections	RTIF
Upgrade of Heritage Interpretation	Multiple locations	Heritage Groups / NAC	MT / LT	TBD	N/A	Identify and upgrade heritage interpretation	Visitor Distribution and Management	RTIF Design Grant

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Abbey Tower Interpretation and Signage	Kilwinning	Kilwinning Heritage	ST / MT	Up to £15k		Provision of renewed interpretation, signage, waste management, and car parking	Visitor Management, investment in heritage site	RTIF
VISITOR BEHAVIOUR and WASTE/LITTER MANAGEMENT								
Ranger Provision – Supporting Beach Cleaning Volunteers	Coastal / Islands	Community Groups	ST	Up to £50K depending of scale of facility	DNK	Being within scope for the provision of materials/coordination of beach cleaning community volunteers/rangers to collect beach rubbish	Hand-picking on beaches protects the natural ecosystem. Provides a safe environment for visitors	RTIF / TBD
Waste Bin Service Redesign	Strategic replacement of existing waste bin provision with “big-belly” solar-powered compactor bins to hold additional capacity	Street Scene / NAC	ST	£8k-£9k per bin	DNK	Identification of sites.	Greater capacity for waste. Sustainable solar-powered compaction. Strategic collection – bin notifies when full. Recycling options. Reduction in litter from visitors/wild camping/motorhomes	RTIF
OTHER PROJECTS								
Public Multiuse space	Great Harbour	Growth Deal / Community	ST / MT	TBD – as per the Growth Deal Plan		Utility Connectivity for Outdoor multi-use space		RTIF / Growth Deal
Stevenston Beach Hub	Stevenston	Raise Your Voice with Ardeer	ST	£230k	Regeneration Delivery Plan 2023/24	Raise Your Voice with Ardeer has been approved £130,000 additional CIF funding to deliver a new community hub at Stevenston Beach.	The charity has already secured £100k CIF funding in October 2021 to enable the community asset transfer of the land being used at Stevenston shorefront to build an inclusive	Community Investment Fund

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
							and accessible community hub.	
Ardrossan South Beach Hub	Ardrossan	Ardrossan Community Development Trust	ST	£749k	Regeneration Delivery Plan 2023/24	Working in partnership with Ardrossan Community Development Trust to successfully secure £749k from the RCGF for Ardrossan Promenade.		Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF)

## Monitoring and Evaluation

This document will be a 'live' document, reviewed quarterly and updated annually to refine, update, and add new projects and remove completed projects.



## **STRATEGIC TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

### **North Ayrshire - Mainland**



North Ayrshire Council  
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

# **STRATEGIC TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

## **North Ayrshire – Islands: Arran and Great Cumbrae**

**7<sup>th</sup> December 2023**

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# Introduction

Home to 134,000<sup>1</sup> people, North Ayrshire covers an area of 340 square miles and along with the mainland includes the islands of Arran, Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae. Tourism is an important sector in North Ayrshire attracting over 1.4m visitors annually over 2.9m visitor days<sup>2</sup>. The visitor economy supports 3,400 jobs and £230m in economic impact<sup>2</sup> from a wide range of tourism, hospitality, recreation, and leisure businesses.

In order to grow and further enhance North Ayrshire's reputation as a responsible and well-managed tourist destination with strong environmental values, this Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan lays out the case and justification for infrastructure investment within the island communities of North Ayrshire. It includes an analysis of the effects of recent visitor pressures on the environment, infrastructure, and communities, especially in island areas, as well as the efforts made to lessen those pressures.

North Ayrshire Council (NAC) has been leading the effort with the assistance of partner organisations. In addition, this plan includes a series of proposed capital and revenue investments to address visitor growth and alleviate pressure on rural communities. This document aims to contribute to the long-term strategy for improving the experience of visitors to North Ayrshire, its unique tourism characteristics, as well as their impact on the surrounding environment, community, and businesses. The Plan was developed in consultation with North Ayrshire Council and tourism stakeholders, alongside comparator studies and desk research. A separate Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan has been prepared for the mainland of North Ayrshire.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland, Mid 2021 Population Estimate

<sup>2</sup> Source: STEAM 2022



# Background

The Isle of Arran is the seventh largest Scottish island with around 4,537 residents and is the largest island in the Firth of Clyde with an area of 432 square kilometres and is around 19 miles long by 10 miles wide. The Isle of Cumbrae, also known as Great Cumbrae, lies on the Ayrshire coast and is approximately four miles long and two miles wide with a population of 1,295, mostly in the main settlement of Millport. Little Cumbrae, known locally as Wee Cumbrae, lies to the South West of Great Cumbrae and has potential for attracting visitors. Pladda sits to the South of Arran and the new owner plans to develop an accommodation offer. Holy Isle, off the South East coast of Arran, is a sacred site and a significant destination of international appeal for spiritual retreats.



North Ayrshire is a key destination attracting domestic and overseas visitors. In order to support the sector, maximise its potential and manage visitors effectively, North Ayrshire Council (“NAC”) seeks investment to develop modern, effective and sustainable visitor infrastructure. NAC has developed this Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan to attract investment and funding from VisitScotland’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (“RTIF”) and other funding streams, to improve visitor management over the next 5-7 years.

VisitScotland’s RTIF plays a crucial role in ensuring the delivery of NAC plans and attracting investment into visitor infrastructure. NAC aims to seek long-term funding support from RTIF and therefore now requires a strategic investment plan to meet this goal. The purpose of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (STIDP) is to provide

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medium-to-long-term tourism infrastructure solutions to complement North Ayrshire's Visitor Management Plans, which include smaller-scale and shorter-term project objectives. While some projects are expected to be delivered by the Council, the Plan also includes a number of projects likely to be taken forward by partner agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) or communities.

## What is the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund?

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) was established by the Scottish Government and the Fund is managed by VisitScotland on its behalf. RTIF is designed to support collaborative projects which focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that are facing pressure on their infrastructure and communities as a result of visitor numbers.

To enable a more strategic approach to visitor infrastructure development and greater alignment with the objectives of Scotland Outlook 2030 and the new National Strategy for Economic Development, RTIF has supported the development of a number of Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans in rural areas across Scotland. The Strategic Infrastructure Plans will inform the priorities for RTIF over the next three to five years.

Only Local Authorities and National Park Authorities can apply for RTIF funding. The types of projects that could be supported include parking, motorhome facilities (including disposal points), viewpoints, paths, toilet provision and EV and e-bike charge points.

Successful applications support the objectives of the national tourism strategy "Scotland Outlook 2030" and the Scottish Government's "National Strategy for Economic Development". Projects will also demonstrate the following:

- Evidence that the project will address an existing or anticipated visitor pressure point.
- That a strategic need is met or a gap is addressed by the actions proposed.
- To provide a quality visitor experience.

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- Will take a responsible tourism approach to the planning, design, building and management of the infrastructure provision.
  - That an environmental and community focus is applied to the development.
  - Provide evidence of engagement with local community groups, destination organisations and tourism businesses, demonstrating partnership working.

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# Tourism and Market Trends

North Ayrshire is a beautiful area located in the southwest of Scotland, known for its stunning coastline, and easily-accessible islands. As popular tourist destinations, North Ayrshire's islands offer a wide range of attractions and activities for visitors of all ages and interests.

The Isle of Arran is often referred to as "Scotland in miniature" due to its diverse landscape, including mountains, forests, and beaches. Visitors can explore the island's rich history and culture by visiting its many visitor attractions. There are also opportunities for hiking, cycling, and water sports. Cumbrae offers many leisure opportunities, including walking, wild swimming, golf, cycling and wildlife watching. The island has a reputation as an attractive visitor destination and is particularly popular among cyclists of all ages thanks to a safe, mostly flat, circular loop around the island. Pladda and Little Cumbrae both have potential for development as visitor destinations, and Holy Isle is a nature reserve and home to a Buddhist community and welcomes day visitors and volunteers.

Tourism is a significant contributor to the North Ayrshire economy. Tourism figures provided by STEAM (2022) found that Cumbrae attracted 68,920 visitors over 142,410 visitor days, where they spent £6.88 million in direct expenditure. On the Isle of Arran in 2022 there were 373,300 visitors over 848,170 visitor days, with a direct expenditure of £56.52m.

In 2022 Cumbrae had a total tourism employment of 123 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs with an economic impact of £9.1m. In the same period the Isle of Arran's tourism economy was worth £76.11m economic impact and supported 1,337 Full Time Equivalent jobs.

Typically, the North Ayrshire area will welcome around 1.4 million visitors per annum over 2.9 million visitor days. The Isle of Arran is a popular destination, both in Scotland and within the area attracting just under half a million visitors per year. Goatfell is a major landmark and visitor attraction on the island attracting an annual 24,308 visitors to climb the mountain. Brodick Castle is also a major attraction typically welcoming 68,000 visitors. Tourism supports around 1,248 jobs on the Isle of Arran, however post-pandemic there are

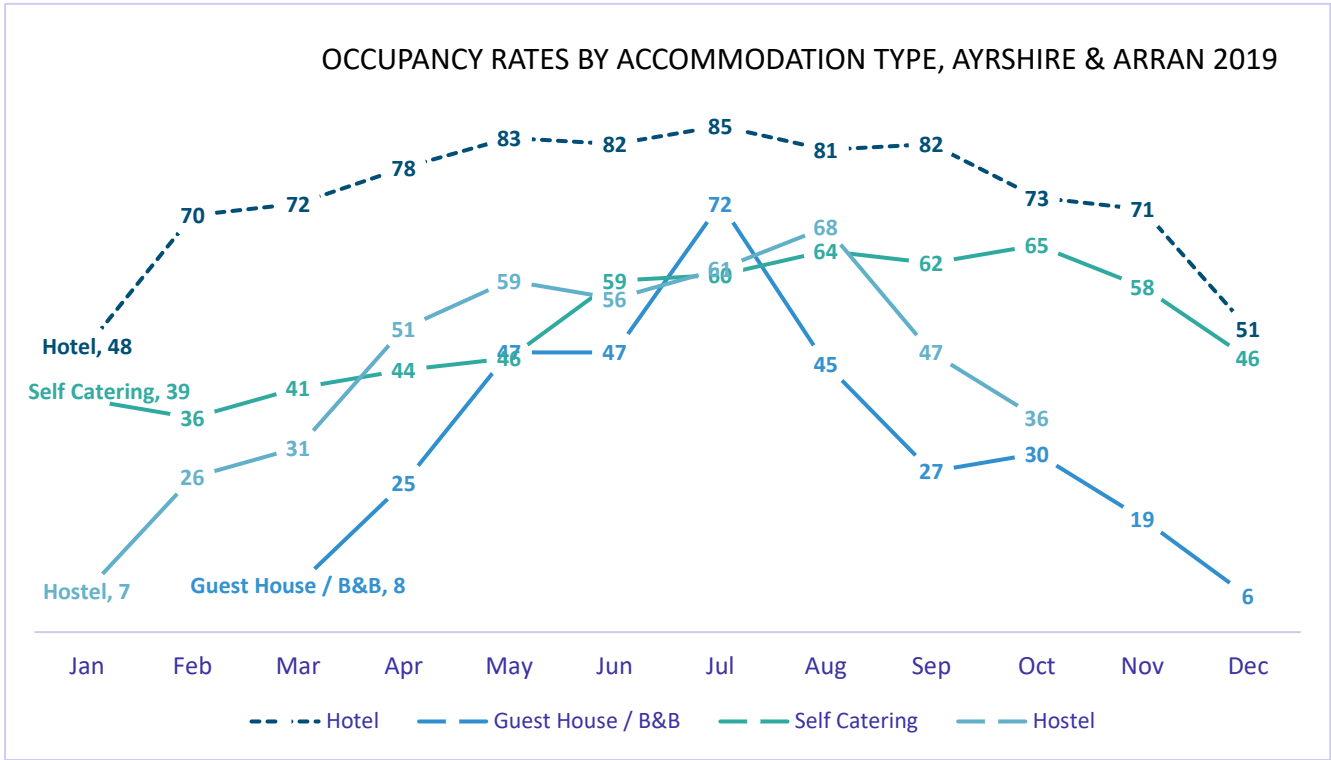
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challenges in recruiting and retaining staff which is a contributor to the economic growth profile of the visitor economy on the island.

The Isle of Cumbrae, smaller in size than Arran but still very popular with visitors attracts over 70,000 visitors a year. Tourism, along with healthcare are the main sectors of employment and drivers of the economy on the island. The profile of visitors to Cumbrae tends towards day visitors compared to more overnight visitors to Arran, based primarily on accessibility and visitor profiles.

There has been an overall change in behaviour during and following the pandemic which looks set to continue. Outdoor activities and the spaces North Ayrshire has to offer have a renewed appeal to visitors and residents and popular destinations continue to experience strong demand for parking, motorhome accommodation, public conveniences, an increase in littering, waste and antisocial behaviour and queuing for ferries at peak times. While overseas visitor numbers have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, national and local visitors who discovered what North Ayrshire has to offer are continuing to make return visits. Uncertainty over extreme weather overseas due to climate change also makes staycations more attractive. The increase in use of North Ayrshire spaces by both residents and visitors has put an additional burden on Council services and on our tourism infrastructure and has had an impact on communities in ‘honeypot’ locations.

Capacity and seasonality are key factors in terms of tourism investment. Mainland North Ayrshire and the islands of Arran and Cumbrae are subject to higher overnight visitor numbers in the summer than in winter. The following table shows occupancy rates across the wider Ayrshire and Arran area with pre-pandemic occupancy rates.



Source: VisitScotland Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey, 2019

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# Strategic Priorities

Strategic Development within North Ayrshire is influenced by a number of plans and policy areas. These include:

- North Ayrshire Council Visitor Management Plan 2023
- North Ayrshire Council Local Development Plan 2019
- Ayrshire & Arran Visitor Economy Leadership Group “Ayrshire & Our Islands Visitor Economy Strategy” 2023
- North Ayrshire Council Community Wealth Building Strategy
- Arran Local Island Plan
- Cumbrae Local Island Plan
- Islands Connectivity Study
- The Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy 2024-2027
- Place Frameworks

The overarching objectives of these plans are the sustainable growth of the economy and the supporting jobs and communities in a responsible way to protect the environment. Among the objectives of the North Ayrshire Council Visitor Management Plan 2023 are for example:

- Encourage sustainable visitor patterns by promoting our tourism assets and potential across all of North Ayrshire, including our inland localities
- To establish North Ayrshire as a leading responsible tourism destination in Scotland.
- To increase the impact and benefit of tourism across North Ayrshire’s communities.
- To make North Ayrshire a digitally discoverable and enabled destination.

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## Stakeholder Prioritisation

Following engagement with a range of stakeholders on the Islands to understand views on the development of visitor infrastructure within the area the following priorities were identified in terms of developing visitor infrastructure.

- Motorhome management
- Improvements to car parking infrastructure
- Public Transport, specifically access to the Islands through the ferry services
- Improvements to road infrastructure
- Improvements to cycling infrastructure (bike storage, service points, cycle paths).
- Visitor amenities including toilet Facilities

For the Islands, the main focus for investment is to engage and hold the visitor across seasons. The islands, while having distinct investment requirements, show similarities with the Mainland in terms of community wealth generation, and sustainable and responsible tourism infrastructure. Matters including car parking, toilets and motorhome management were comparable between the mainland and the islands. It is in visitor engagement infrastructure that the biggest impact for the Islands could be made. Examples of this type of investment for the Isles included:

- Routes, Trails and Picnic Areas in scenic spots
- Interpretation of natural, historic, built and industrial heritage
- Self-guided tours and “outdoor museums”
- Moorings and ‘step ashore’ type berths for private boats (such as Ribs and smaller Yachts)
- Motorhome parking and waste disposal
- Facilities for outdoor activities.

The investment enquiries were all framed within a consistent context that all stakeholders highlighted. While out of scope for a Strategic Tourism Investment Development Plan the following was raised as a major factor for future development and delivery of the visitor economy on mainland and island tourism communities.



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1. Access – principally the ferries which included capacity and reliability.
  2. Affordable Housing to retain and attract staff to work in tourism
  3. Lack of tradespeople on islands which makes private investment costlier coming from the mainland.
  4. Staffing – relating to affordable housing but also the broader industry issue of making tourism an attractive career opportunity compared to other industry sectors.

### Current challenges facing tourism in North Ayrshire

- Staff availability
- Inflation, energy, and operating costs
- Waste Management
- Parking
- Toilets
- Marketing
- Public Transport
- Lack of motorhome facilities
- Community backlash against visitors
- Accommodation Availability
- Attracting Overnight Visitors
- Attracting International Visitor Markets

### Current opportunities for tourism in North Ayrshire

- Adventure Tourism
- Shift to sustainable behaviours
- Coastal Environment
- Industrial Heritage
- Local Community Improvement Plans
- Staycations
- Extending seasons
- Active Travel
- Marine Tourism
- Proximity to key markets (domestic and international)

Looking more broadly at opportunities and challenges in relation to tourism delivery for North Ayrshire the following responses were provided through stakeholders:

#### Biggest challenges for tourism to 2025

- Visitor Management
- Strategic Leadership
- Staffing
- Increased cost of operation
- Economy
- Domestic market going overseas
- Retaining market share
- Antisocial tourism behaviour

#### Biggest Opportunities to 2025

- Regeneration of communities
- Capitalise on new developments
- Increased Accessibility to Islands
- Provision of pre-visit information
- Access for all
- Specialising in marine and outdoor tourism
- Increasing visitors from Central Belt
- Inter-regional collaboration

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## Funding and Legislation Landscape

National and local strategies determine the parameters within which tourism infrastructure development will be identified and prioritised. It should be noted that there are strategic levers which will frame the implementation of the infrastructure development.

National and Local Government policy may provide constraints and opportunities for investment within the tourism sector. Transient Visitor Levy and the Short-term Let legislation have a direct impact on tourism in North Ayrshire and Scotland more broadly. While there may be increased bureaucracy for businesses the object of the respective policies are to address negative elements of tourism expansion while potentially generating new funding sources to support tourism infrastructure projects. Other policies directly influencing tourism include The Land Reform Act, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and the Climate Change Act 2019.

Funding is available from a number of sources. Principal among these is the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF). RTIF was established by the Scottish Government and the Fund is managed by VisitScotland on its behalf. RTIF design grants of up to £20k are awarded at a 100% intervention rate and more than one can be applied for at a time. Full RTIF grants are awarded at a 75% intervention rate, with a requirement for 25% match funding. This match funding can be from other funding sources and/or set against officer time and in-kind services. The minimum RTIF full grant is £150k against a £200k project.

To enable a more strategic approach to visitor infrastructure development and greater alignment with the objectives of Scotland Outlook 2030 and the new National Strategy for Economic Development, RTIF is supporting the development of Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans in rural areas across Scotland including North Ayrshire. These Strategic Infrastructure Plans will inform the priorities for RTIF over the next three to five years.

Other investment funds which may influence the tourism investment in North Ayrshire may include the NatureScot Better Places Fund, providing support for the employment of

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seasonal rangers and visitor operations posts to engage with the public and help manage visitor numbers, pressures and behaviors in “hot spot” locations across Scotland. Civtech is another pathway for the public sector to resolve identified problems through collaboration with technology innovators.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has provided some funding for projects over recent years. Cumbrae Community Development Company was supported by HIE and NAC to develop motorhome facilities behind Garrison House in Millport to help with the management of visiting motorhomes. This project took place prior to the recent influx of motorhomes to the region.

The Ayrshire Growth Deal is a major investment fund and two of its projects are tourism related, including the development of marine tourism infrastructure on Arran and at Millport on the Isle of Cumbrae.

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# Prioritised Regional Infrastructure Plans

The approach for prioritised infrastructure development is based on a framework to identify the strategic deliverable goals which were identified within the analysis of stakeholder engagement, local plans and visitor management priorities. These are:

- Economic – projects which will enhance the visitor economy, supporting businesses and jobs by the provision of infrastructure and services that will attract and retain visitors to a destination in a responsible manner.
- Environmental – relating to sustainable benefits to the natural or built environment. It is also associated with waste management and health and well-being.
- Community – Tourism has been recognised as having an impact both positive and negative on residents of destinations. Community engagement was highlighted in the stakeholder survey as a priority area. Infrastructure which encourages responsible tourism and minimises the impact on residents while increasing visitors' dwell time is encouraged.
- Education – Services and infrastructure that inform and educate visitors on responsible and sustainable tourism, that add dimension to a visit through storytelling or information and that distribute visitors away from areas of tourism congestion.

Priority Locality Plans provide details of development and additional information relevant to the Islands.

## **Isle of Arran and Great Cumbrae**

### **Background**

The two largest islands of Arran and Great Cumbrae are significant assets to the visitor economy of North Ayrshire. Recognition of Arran alone among domestic and international visitors is significant. The role that tourism plays in the island economies is crucial to the

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sustainability and wellbeing of these communities and there is a developed tourism industry and industry bodies that develop and support the sector.

### **Pressures**

The main issue for the islands is accessibility by ferry. This compounds visitor numbers through capacity and reliability of service. With the introduction of the Road Equivalent Tariff in 2014 there have been increased visitor numbers and resultant traffic on the islands, which benefited tourism, but increased motorhome access in recent years has resulted in pressures on communities to accommodate this trend. A lack of dedicated motorhome provision means that motorhome users are parking in laybys and on verges, causing congestion and damage. There is also the issue of staff availability and affordable housing. On a positive note, there is an established practice of private investment to address issues relating to business growth.

An example of this is Auchrannie Resort which has provided staff accommodation, a range of accommodation types for visitors and motorhome facilities on their grounds.

The islands don't appear to have the same level of issues of antisocial behaviour by tourists as the mainland has and there is a moderately well-established network of car parks, toilets and EV chargers. The main areas of beneficial investment are in motorhome provision, waste management, visitor engagement investment such as interpretation of heritage, trails etc and development of active travel routes which enhance exploration of the environment and make it accessible to all.

The Isle of Arran has seen two Rangers being heavily involved in island priorities. Amongst the activities there have been path repairs, clearing overgrowth, and building new and replacement structures (steps and boardwalks). In addition, there has been engagement with wild campers and camper-van users about respecting the countryside. Rangers have also been clearing away rubbish left following "dirty camping" behaviour and beach cleaning. Their role has also included putting out fires on grasslands. The Rangers are a seasonal post and there is no guarantee of funding for future years.

### **Infrastructure Priorities**

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The requirements for the Islands are subtly different to those of the mainland. The Islands require a mix of practical infrastructure (motorhome facilities, storage of waste until collection from the mainland) combined with investment in facilities to attract, engage and retain visitors on the island to promote overnight stays, increase spend and engage with local businesses and providers.

The Arran Geopark project is working towards UNESCO status. With this comes requirements for infrastructure and facilities to support, preserve and interpret the wide-ranging landscape the Isle of Arran has to offer.

# Action Plan

The STIDP North Ayrshire Island Action Plan was created to facilitate a collaborative partnership approach for the implementation of the area's strategic tourism goals. It considers projects of all sizes and is based on variable timescales for investment and prioritisation with the Visitor Management Plan, Local Plan and budgetary constraints.

Cost indicators have been determined with project owners coordinating the ongoing finance strategy and investigating any acceptable funding possibilities as they occur. The funding will be a combination of Scottish Government, Local Authority, commercial investment and community funding, and will cover both capital and revenue operations.

Key and Potential Partners:	Timescales:
North Ayrshire Council (NAC)	ST – Short Term (2023 – 2025)
Scottish Government	MT – Medium Term (2025 – 2028)
UK Government	LT – Long Term (2028 – 2035)
Community Partnerships / Local Landowners	
CalMac Ferries	TBD – To Be Determined
VisitArran	DNK – Not known at this time
Ayrshire and Arran Destination Alliance (AADA)	
Cumbræ Community Development Company (CCDC)	
Isle of Cumbræ Tourism Association (IOCTA)	
Development Trusts and Community Groups	
Street Scene (Environmental Volunteering)	
Censis / National Innovation Centres	
Heritage Groups	
Enterprise Agencies	
VisitScotland	
RSPB	
Ayrshire Growth Deal	
NatureScot	
Arran Geopark	
Historic Environment Scotland	



Crown Estate Scotland National Trust for Scotland UNESCO Sustrans Arran Estates Forestry & Land Scotland	
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PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
PRIORITY PROJECT – MOTORHOME FACILITIES AND PARKING MANAGEMENT								
Motorhome Provision	Arran and Cumbrae	NAC, Community Groups	ST	£20k	None	Identification of suitable areas and levels of facilities required to relieve pressure caused by unregulated motorhome parking with a cost-recovery model where appropriate. To include black waste disposal at key locations.	Development of costed plans ready for project investment	RTIF Design Grant
				£200k (Ayrshire-wide)	TBD	Creation of a network of facilities across North Ayrshire.	Provision of services, reduced littering and congestion, dispersal of visitors from hotspots. Increased local spend.	RTIF Grant
Visitor Pit Stop Upgrades	Region Wide	NAC, Community	ST/MT	TBD	N/A	Identify and Upgrade Toilet provision within the region  Requirements identified within the Visitor Management Plan as Pitstops Project and progressing.	Additional facilities to include motorhome waste disposal and servicing points.	As above
Millport Parking Management	Millport, Cumbrae	Community Groups  NAC	ST/MT	TBD	None – Speculative	Community Concern over tourists parking in non-designated areas. The requirement to understand how to inform visitors on where to park	Official Signage – “no parking” would have to be on private land. Investigate how to inform and manage parking and community expectations.	RTIF Design Grant

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Upgrade car parking and Electric Vehicle infrastructure	Arran and Cumbrae	Scottish Government	ST	£0.259m		Part of Regeneration Delivery Plan		Scottish Government's Islands Infrastructure Fund
Scoping for EV Charging for Future Electric Boats	Millport	NEC / CalMac	LT	TBD	N/A	Technology, Experimental.	Futureproofing and NetZero prep for potential electric boats	RTIF Design Grant
TRANSPORT, ROUTES, PATHS and ACTIVE TRAVEL								
Cumbrae Ferry Port Slip Improvement	Cumbrae	CalMac	MT/LT	£300k - £600k  2023/24 Capital Programme Allocation £350,000	2023/24 Capital Programme. Cumbrae Ferry Bus Stop and Queuing Facilities To deliver the next phase of recommendations of the feasibility study developed in 2021/22 including detailed designs and construction	Need for queueing lanes, marshals and shelters. Potential for a digital solution to the marshalling requirement.	Improvement to service. Increased efficiency towards visitor management.	RTIF Grant
Cycle Route to Millport from Ferry Terminal	Cumbrae Slipway to Millport	CalMac(?) / Landowners	MT	TBD	None – Speculative	Identify active travel solutions and a safe cycling route from the ferry to Millport. Involves identifying and obtaining agreement from landowners for route	Contribute to active travel, sustainable travel and community safety	RTIF Design Grant

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Transit Marinas	Arran and Cumbrae	Ayrshire Growth Deal / NAC/Community Groups/VisitArran	MT	TBD	TBD	Programme of consultation and development work via AGD to add marina step-ashore facilities at Arran, Cumbrae.	Widening access to the island and relieving pressure from carbon-based modes of transport.	AGD
Mobility As A Service	Arran and Cumbrae	National Innovations Centres, Tech Industry, NAC, Transport Providers	LT	£80K to £100k	N/A	Digital Solutions to Connect Destinations around the island with integrated public transport services and alerts to disruption  Highlighted within Visitor Management Plan 2023. Elements already under consideration.	Connectivity of public transport services and active travel to reduce emissions and make transport easier for visitors	Possible CivTech Digital Solution to integrate Bus / Ferry timetables to inform visitors of networks, times and disruptions.
Active Travel Projects	Brodick to Corrie  Brodick to Lamlash	North Ayrshire Council / Arran Estates / Sustrans / Forestry & Land Scotland	ST	Funding Identified	Funding for detailed design drawings	Subject to approval of landowners.	Improve connections and improve the National Cycle Network	TBD
Dyemill Park	Arran	North Ayrshire Council / Local Heritage Group	ST	Project Value £570,000 £220,625 grant sought	Part of the Regeneration Delivery Plan	Priorities for the 2024/25 round of the programme will be identified through engagement with the Island Plan Delivery Groups.	To build, manage and maintain an accessible, inclusive and safe, all-weather environment to grow and develop the island's cycling community,	Scottish Government's Islands Programme

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
							inspiring Arran to cycle.	
HERITAGE, INTERPRETATION and TRAILS								
Arran Mountain Bike Trail	Arran	Arran High School Mountain Bike Club	ST	£20K to £30K	N/A	Trail maintenance and development, provision of accessible access to trails.	Widening involvement in active travel and exploration through accessibility	TBD
Upgrade of Heritage Interpretation	Multiple locations	Heritage Groups / NAC	ST/MT	TBD	N/A	Identify and upgrade heritage interpretation	Visitor Distribution and Management	RTIF Design Grant
Island Wide Heritage Trail & STEM Trail	Arran	Geopark	ST/MT	£30K - £60K	TBD	Development of heritage and STEM trail on the island to form a cohesive connection to attractions	Increase dwell time for visitors	RTIF
STEM Trail	Cumrae	NAC	MT	TBD	N/A	Co-creation of the Cumrae trail with the local school taking in the learning from Eglinton Trail	Distribution and engagement of visitors to the island to increase dwell time	RTIF Design Grant.
Millport Heritage Hub	Millport Town Hall	Heritage Groups / VisitArran/ NAC	ST/MT	£50K to £80K	TBD	Provision of interpretation, route marking of the heritage trail	Visitor distribution, Interpretation and information	RTIF
Accessible Interpretation Facilities	Arran	Arran Geopark / Heritage Groups / Accessible Charities / NAC/VisitArran/Arran Trust	MT	TBD	TBD	Provision of accessible interpretation signage throughout the island. This may include braille and relief mapping for the visually impaired or audio commentary.	Provision of accessible information for visitors	RTIF Design Grant/Arran Trust

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Interpretation Panels	St Bride's Chapel, Lamlash.	North Ayrshire Council / Local Heritage Group	ST/MT	£40K	N/A	St Brides interpretation complete as per Visitor Management Plan	Improvements to existing facilities.	RTIF
Upgrade to Geopark interpretation centres	Arran	Geopark / Heritage Groups / National Trust for Scotland / Private Enterprise	ST/MT	TBD	N/A	Three existing interpretation centres relating to Geopark are housed in partner sites. Centres require upgrades and updates.	Improvement of facilities enhances the visitor experience. Delivers opportunities for information provision and responsible tourism messaging.	RTIF
Self-Guided Walks	Arran	Geopark / National Innovation Centres/VisitArran	MT	Up to £5K	N/A	Arran Geopark has 6 self-guided walks which may benefit from interaction with digital solutions to enhance the visitor experience.	Potential Civtech investment for smart sustainable and manageable solutions for guided walks for visitors	RTIF Design Grant or CivTech challenge.
VISITOR BEHAVIOUR and WASTE/LITTER MANAGEMENT								
Ranger Provision – Supporting Beach Cleaning Volunteers	Coastal / Islands	Community Groups	ST		DNK	Being within scope for the provision of materials/coordination of beach cleaning community volunteers/rangers to collect beach rubbish	Hand-picking on beaches protects the natural ecosystem. Provides a safe environment for visitors	RTIF / TBD
Seasonal Ranger Service	Arran	NatureScot	ST	As per the current budget (£25k – 2x rangers, 5-month contract)	N/A	Current ranger provision is provided through annual competitive grant funding application to NatureScot. A more permanent solution sought	Encourages responsible visitor behaviour, and visitor distribution. Education.	RTIF

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Waste Bin Service Redesign	Identification of sites.	Street Scene / NAC	ST	£8k-£9k per bin	DNK	Strategic replacement of existing waste bin provision with “big-belly” solar-powered compactor bins to hold additional capacity.	Greater capacity for waste. Sustainable solar-powered compaction. Strategic collection – bin notifies when full. Recycling options, reduction in litter.	RTIF
OTHER PROJECTS								
Arran Geopark UNESCO Status	Arran	NAC / Geopark /VisitArran	MT	Min. £40k/yr ongoing	N/A	Support Arran Geopark’s UNESCO bid and, once gained, help to maintain the status. Arran is on track to receive the status by 2025 and UNESCO demands revalidation every 4 years.	Preservation and promotion of the destination meeting sustainable and responsible tourism objectives.	RTIF Design Grant
Islands Recovery and Renewal Pilot	Arran and Cumbrae	Scotgov/HIE/NAC, Communities and Stakeholders	LT			Implement ten-year Island Plans for Arran and Cumbrae working in partnership with local island communities and stakeholders, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Government	Inclusive and green economic recovery and renewal of island communities	
Flood Protection Scheme	Cumbrae		ST			Implementation of the Millport Coastal Flood Protection Scheme	Flood protection for Millport and enabling of future marina development under AGD.	

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	KEY PARTNERS	TIMESCALE	BUDGET	PLANNING APPROVAL STATUS	REQUIREMENT AND BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT	BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT	FUNDING MECHANISM
Garrison House Regeneration Scheme	Cumrae	North Ayrshire Council / Local Heritage Group	ST	Project Value £950,934  £730,998 grant sought	Part of Regeneration Delivery Plan	Priorities for the 2024/25 round of the programme will be identified through engagement with the Island Plan Delivery Groups.	To restore, re-purpose and enhance the Garrison House complex in Millport, Isle of Cumrae. This will secure the building fabric for future generations, improve accessibility, improve the availability of and access to services, and increase its energy efficiency and resilience to climate change.	Scottish Government's Islands Programme

## Monitoring and Evaluation

This document will be a 'live' document, reviewed quarterly and updated annually to refine, update, and add new projects and remove completed projects.





## **STRATEGIC TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

### **North Ayrshire – Islands: Arran & Greater Cumbrae**