

# FAIRY POOLS VISITOR FACILITIES BUSINESS PLAN

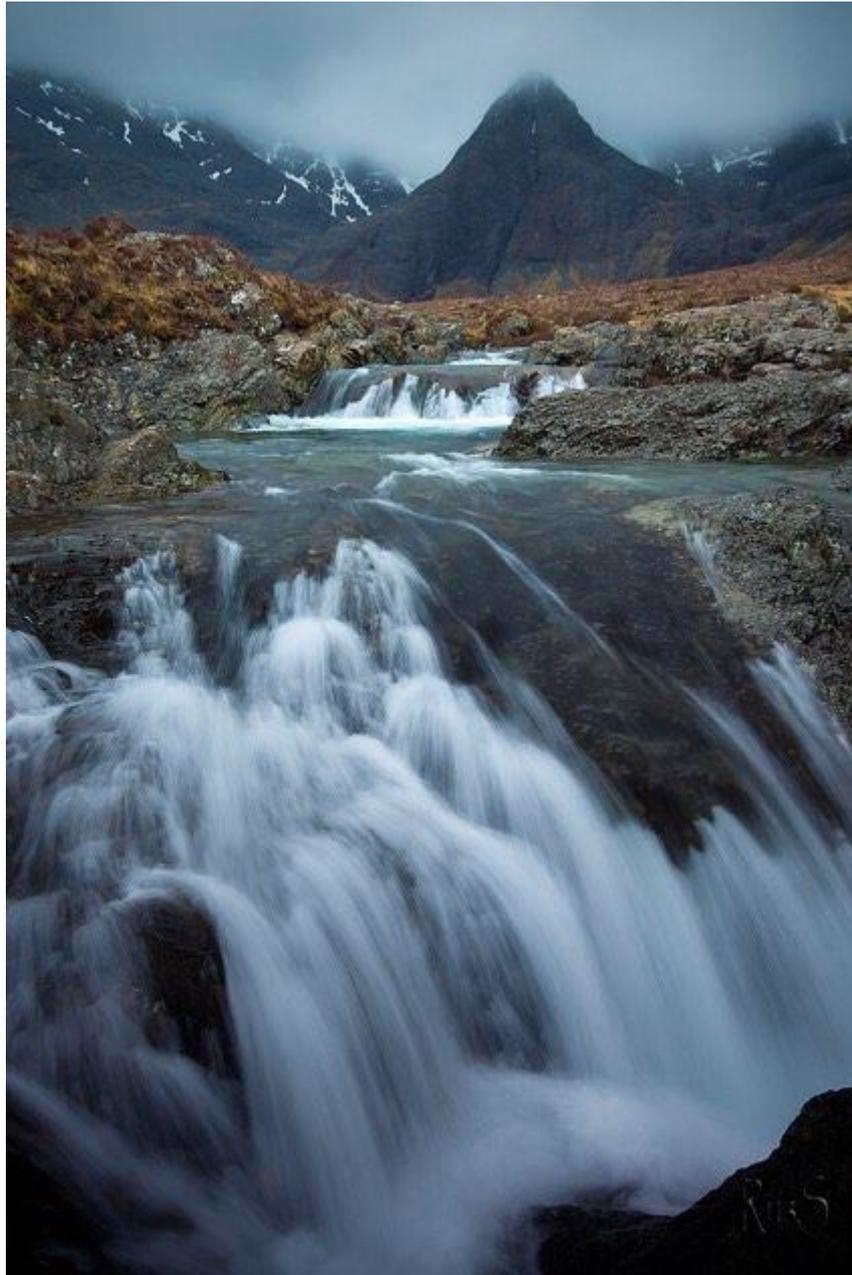


Photo Credit: Russell Sherwood

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## INTRODUCTION

Minginish Community Hall Association (MCHA), an incorporated body representing the interests of the community of Minginish on the Isle of Skye, wishes to improve the facilities at the Fairy Pools attraction to alleviate long term problems for visitors and residents.

The Fairy Pools are a series of beautiful crystal clear pools on the Allt Coir a' Mhadaidh within the Cuillin Hills National Scenic Area. These famous pools entice visitors from all over the world for wild swimming, for walks and picnics and to photograph them against the backdrop of the Black Cuillin. Tourism accounts for almost 30% of the Skye economy.

The rapid growth in popularity of the Fairy Pools means that the number of visitors, and therefore vehicles, visiting the site has overwhelmed the existing parking provision on an almost daily basis throughout the year. This has led to visitors parking both on the verges nearby and in any available passing places.

In addition to causing problems for visitors, it is having a significant impact on the residents of Glen Brittle. The residents reported a number of issues they experience, mainly related to traffic congestion and impeded access on the C1237.

The Highland Council has responsibility for the management of the road network (apart from trunk roads) on the Isle of Skye, but it does not have a statutory obligation to provide parking at any given site. The C1237 is the only public road for residents (and visitors) in and out of Glen Brittle.

With the exception of the road verge itself, the Council does not own any surrounding land at the site. The Fairy Pools are located on the privately owned Macleod Estate whilst the existing principle Car Park is on FES National Forest Estate.

The Forestry Commission invested in car parking at the site in 2010, primarily to provide access to Glen Brittle Forest. However, the Car Park is signed as the Fairy Pools and has become the de facto parking site.

Due to a lack of public toilet facilities at the site, there has been a rise in the number of people using the surrounding land and forest as a toilet.

In 2015 the Highland Council commissioned Bryden Associates to carry out an options appraisal study to identify the best way to deal with the issues. The recommended option is replicated below:

*“Increasing provision to accommodate most, if not all, of the current Fairy Pools car parking demand in dedicated parking spaces, leaving the C1237 free of parked vehicles is the most desirable outcome for most stakeholders. The options are most effectively delivered on land that is part of the National Forest Estate.”*

Ideally, The Highland Council (THC) or Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) would have sufficient funds to increase the parking provisions to a suitable level however, in this difficult financial climate, neither organisation has access to sufficient funds. It was on that basis that Minginish Community Hall Association (MCHA) has taken on the role of managing the project, with support from both the Council and the land Owner.

A representative Steering Group including the Highland Council, Minginish Community Council, Minginish Community Hall Association, Glen Brittle residents, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Elected Members and the Emergency Services was set up to source a solution for those affected.

## Project Vision

To raise funds in the region of £500,000 that will enable the project to deliver the following aims:

- To take Community ownership of the existing car park at the Fairy Pools and additional surrounding land, a total area of 12.3 hectares.
- To create a car park that will provide sufficient parking for most visitors, and therefore prevent surrounding verges and passing places being blocked by cars.
- To improve access for local residents, visitors and the emergency services.
- To provide the facilities expected of a Tourist destination in the twenty first century.
- To invest future income from the car park in the maintenance and development of the site and to support other projects within the wider community.
- To provide longer term opportunities for local employment, sustaining the Minginish area as an attractive area in which to live and work.

## 1.1 PROJECT OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

### Project Objectives

The prime objective of the Fairy Pools Parking project is to tackle the ongoing problems with parking and lack of facilities at this popular tourist destination through:

1. Taking ownership of the existing car park for the community.
2. Purchasing sufficient land to allow the car park to be expanded.
3. Providing safe parking for a minimum of 125 vehicles.
4. Installing environmentally friendly toilets for visitors.
5. Providing a site for a concession stand to allow drinks/snacks to be sold.
6. Generating an ongoing income to benefit the local community and for maintenance at the site
7. Installing suitable signage and interpretation boards
8. Identifying and creating suitable viewing points
9. Considering other uses for the site such as promoting walking and cycling or as a Dark Sky viewing point.

### Project Outcomes.

The project will have the following benefits-

1. Reduce the level of traffic congestion caused by poor parking.
2. Reduce the amount of damage to both verges and road edges.
3. Remove the human waste left at the site by visitors
4. Improve the lives of local residents by improving access for them
5. Reduce the environmental damage caused by vehicles and tourists
6. Improve the "Visitor Experience" for tourists
7. Provide employment opportunities.
8. Allow the site to be developed sustainably to benefit the whole community.
9. Provide long term income to support other community projects.

There is a requirement to meet the needs of the Residents of Glenbrittle by reducing, as far as possible, the amount of disruption caused by visitors to the Fairy Pools.

It is crucial that the project protects the wild and rugged beauty of the site by not over developing it and thereby damaging that which people come to see. A careful balance is required between the needs of residents, the desire of people to visit and the protection of the natural environment. Any development must be sustainable and ideally will provide a long-term funding source for investment in the wider community.

## 1.2 ORGANISATION

Minginish Community Hall Association (MCHA) is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Established in 1998, it has grown from the construction and successful operation of a community hall to adopt a new constitution in 2016 which reflects wider ambitions across the Minginish area.

To enable us to develop further projects for community benefit that may not be revenue-generating, there is a need for steady income from core activities. The opportunity to own and develop visitor facilities at Fairy Pools has been considered a potential source of long term revenue that would support this. In addition to solving immediate issues, it is a key element of the longer term strategy for the community.

Other projects that MCHA wish to pursue in the short to medium term include improvements to the community playpark at Carbost, improvements to broadband provision for outlying settlements that will not be served by BT's superfast broadband programme, and preservation of local heritage. In the longer term, the aim is to attract micro businesses to the area and improve the availability of housing for young families.

As the intention is for the Minginish Community to own the Fairy Pools car park site, and benefit from any funds generated, the community must take the lead in ensuring the project succeeds. MCHA has taken on the role of project leaders.

A Project Officer was appointed to facilitate this lead. The post is part funded by MCHA funds and match funded by The Highland Council and Highland & Islands Enterprise (HIE)

MCHA intend to work together with all stakeholders to ensure the best possible outcome for the project. The main stakeholders are the residents of Glenbrittle, the wider Minginish Community, The Highland Council (THC), Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) and the MacLeod Estate .

## 2.1 COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS AND MARKET RESEARCH

There is widespread support both from the Glen Brittle residents and the wider Minginish community for a sensible and sustainable solution to the problem of parking at the Fairy Pools. This support will be documented through continued community engagement, at community events and via a public consultation.

## **Need-**

There is a clearly identified need for the improvements to the car park. With well over 100,000 visitors a year expected to visit the site, when combined with its relative remoteness, the current parking arrangements are overwhelmed on a regular basis.

Passing places and verges on the single-track road are used as “overflow parking” creating congestion and damage.

A short walk into the trees surrounding the area will provide all the evidence needed for the installation of toilets. Piles of human waste and damp tissues are both a blot on the landscape, unhygienic and damaging to the natural environment

Restricted access for local residents causes problems with the delivery of lifeline goods and products including farm supplies, youth hostel provisions, post and general deliveries. There are delays in access for emergency vehicles on call-out to local residents, injured or lost hillwalkers and visitors. Gridlock is a regular occurrence with local people reporting directing traffic in order to get through. Pedestrians cross from the Car Park to the path in the face of oncoming traffic, including visiting children running excitedly out of the Car Park on to the road.

**Supply-** There are very few options for anyone wishing to visit the Fairy Pools, there is no public transport to the site. There is one other small car park which is a reasonable distance to walk from. The visiting tour buses are generally only for organised tours and still need a place to park.

Go Skye has started a regular minibus service to various destinations across Skye, including the Fairy Pools, however this has a limited capability to reduce traffic levels. The remoteness of the site means that to walk or cycle would be a fairly serious undertaking which, whilst it would be encouraged, is unlikely to account for many visitors.

The majority of visiting tourists use private cars and this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. This means an expanded car park will be the first choice for most visitors.

The nearest public toilets are situated more than 20 miles away. There are new toilets in Carbost and also at the Old Inn in Carbost, and at Minginish Community Hall, but not all are well known or they have restricted opening hours, meaning they are not an ideal solution for large numbers of visitors.

**Demand-** There has been a significant rise in tourists visiting all tourist destinations on the Isle of Skye. All indications are that 2017 will be at least as busy as 2016.

Many factors such as the growth in social media, the value of the pound and the many films and TV programs which have shown people the beauty of the West of Scotland, mean growth looks likely to continue.

The amount of human waste deposited around the area gives a clear indication of demand for toilet facilities. There is a general shortage of toilets within the region, and other areas are also seeking solutions to this problem.

**Pricing** - Any extended facility will need to be self-sustaining. The project, once it is operational, needs to be viable and able to fund any repairs or upgrades without seeking further funds.

There are very few areas where free parking is provided. Areas such as the Lake District National Park and Peak District charge for all their parking however remote. Although few areas on Skye currently charge for parking it is unlikely this situation will continue indefinitely.

If parking charges are kept to a minimum and it is made clear that all funds are going to either-

- a) Fund repairs and improvements to parking and facilities or
- b) Provide local employment or
- c) Fund other local community projects

then it would be less likely anyone would object. The proposal is to keep charges at around £2 or £3 per car, which is significantly lower than similar sites elsewhere in the UK. This low charge would discourage people from trying to find alternatives. Combined with clearer signage directing visitors towards the improved car park and signs that parking on verges and passing places in the area is illegal, should result in most vehicles using the new parking area.

There is also the potential to raise funds either by making a charge for the use of any toilet facility or by asking for donations via an honesty box.

### 3.1 PHASING AND PRIORITIES

The main priority is the increase in parking provision, this will take precedence over everything else. Improved signage will be included to direct visitors to the parking area.

The provision of suitable toilets is a high priority; however the relatively high cost of installation of toilets which prevent any discharge into the surrounding area, means this may have to be delayed to phase 2 if sufficient funds cannot be raised in the short term.

The installation of picnic tables, benches and interpretation signs would ideally take place whilst phase 1 is being completed, however this is dependent on raising sufficient funds beyond that required for parking.

### 3.2 BENEFICIARIES, BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

The core target area for this project is the area of Glenbrittle but the benefits of the improvements will be felt across the whole of the Minginish area. The partnership approach, which is enabling this scheme to progress, will deliver the project as a catalyst for investment and benefit in other regional initiatives and organisations.

The following are the projected long term changes;

- The new car park will result in a community owned asset directly tackling a serious problem which is having a detrimental effect on a small but significant section of the population of the area. It will help tackle the social exclusion they feel from being isolated from the wider region and encourage residents to remain living and working in Glen Brittle.
- The quality of life for residents in Minginish and beyond will improve with access restored and employment and business opportunities available. 600 people living in this remote rural area will remain committed to the area and new families will be attracted here. The age profile may change with younger professionals and families choosing to live and work locally.

- Taking on ownership of this community asset will enhance and protect the heritage, cultural and green environment of Minginish, increasing community pride and self-esteem and drawing in more visitors.
- The project will provide increased employment in an area of limited opportunities, both through direct employment and through providing business opportunities. The project will provide investment and support to new and existing ventures which will then feed out into the wider region.
- 100,000 + visitors and local people will benefit from an improved understanding and enjoyment of the area's historical and cultural heritage. Visitors will have a better experience encouraging them to stay longer, return in the future and promote the area widely as being a good place to visit.

## 4.1 PARTNERS

MCHA are working with several partners to ensure the successful delivery of the project, these include-

- The Highland Council, who are providing support and some financial backing to the project. In addition, they are helping with road repairs and ongoing maintenance.
- Forest Enterprise Scotland, who are working with MCHA on the transfer of the land through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme.
- The Macleod Estate who are supporting the proposed work.
- Police Scotland who have written a letter of support and are helping to improve traffic management.
- Coach tour companies, who have committed financial support to the project.
- Skye Mountain Rescue Team, who use the road through Glen Brittle on a regular basis as they maintain a base and co-ordinate rescues from here.

## 5.0 FINANCE: COSTS, FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

A provisional design has been created by Mike Hyatts, the Landscape Architects, based on the design brief created by the steering group. This will provide preliminary costings on which to base funding applications. This will cover the capital costs of the construction work of the carpark and will include costs for toilets and for a concession stand.

If MCHA is unable to generate sufficient funds for the whole project, it may be necessary to phase the project in three stages and fund stages 2 and 3 from income generated.

## 5.2 COST ESTIMATES AND FUNDING STRATEGY

### Capital costs

Item	Cost	Comment
Land Purchase	£3,500	Funding from Scottish Land Fund Stage 2
Legal and other fees for conveyancing	£tbc	
Professional fees	£tbc	
Capital Cost of Development of Carpark	£500,000	Costs based on Landscape Architects estimate (The "Hyatt plan")
Toilets	Included in development costs	Estimate, based on quotation for zero discharge toilets, estimated cost for wooden building and groundworks.
Signs and interpretation boards	As above	Estimated based on rough quotations
Picnic benches	As above	Estimated based on rough quotations
View point	As above	Estimation

### Funding Strategy

Below is an outline funding strategy based on applications made to date. Funding sources can change and this is an indicative list. Local fundraising is important in bringing the community together and demonstrating commitment, but is only a small part of the overall funding needed.

Funder	Amount to be requested	Comments
Leader	£120,000	TBC but expression of intent submitted
The Highland Council	£100,000	TBC August 2017
Garfield Weston	£90,000	Applied for
HIE	£50,000	TBC
Rabbies Tours	£2,500	Verbal agreement
Timberbush Tours	£2,500	Verbal agreement
McLeod Estate	£1,000	Verbal agreement
Fundraising	£2,000	Online fund raising, collection boxes, donations.
Paths for All	£1,500	Project qualifies for grant
<b>Total</b>	<b>£369,500</b>	
Anticipated costs based on Hyatt design document	£500,000	

<b>Funding Gap</b> (assuming Hyatt plan is followed)	<u><b>£130,500</b></u>	This figure will change depending on applications made and whether they are successful or not. Also subject to change if new sources of funding can be found.  The project may have to be developed on a phased basis if insufficient funds are available to complete the whole project in year one.
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## 5.3 INCOME GENERATION AND FINANCIAL VIABILITY

### Levels of income generation

**Parking:** Based on current levels of visits (2016- 108,000 visitors) it is estimated the number of vehicles looking for somewhere to park is between 36,000 and 54,000. Depending on the level parking charges are set at, the level of income generated annually will vary considerably.

No. Vehicles/charge	£1	£2	£3
10,000	£10,000	£20,000	£30,000
20,000	£20,000	£40,000	£60,000
30,000	£30,000	£60,000	£90,000
40,000	£40,000	£80,000	£120,000
50,000	£50,000	£100,000	£150,000
60,000	£60,000	£120,000	£180,000

Discussions with the two largest tour bus operators have taken place. They both stated they understood charging would be required in the future and would be happy to be invoiced based on the number of visits they make.

### Other potential income sources

**Toilets:** If toilets are installed the levels of maintenance and cleaning required would suggest charging for the use of them. The options for this would include either a set fee, with a method of charging on entry or a voluntary scheme with an explanation of what the charge is for. Based on an assumption of between 25% and 50% of visitors using the facilities with a charge of 50p a potential annual income of between £6,000 and £25,000 is anticipated.

**Concession Stand:** A site for a concession stand has the potential to generate a reasonable income. By providing a flat space for a third party to run a mobile concession stand, a seasonal charge could be made for that use.

Income generated within the mid to high range set out in the table above would support at least two full time equivalent employment opportunities in future years. Local businesses would be given the opportunity to operate any concession facility providing business generation and growth plus the potential for additional employment.

## 5.4 RISK AND RISK MITIGATION

The key risks relevant to the success of the project are set out below along with mitigating actions.

Risk	Impact	Probability	Existing controls	Action required
Finance cannot be secured to deliver the project	High	Medium	Project Officer working to secure funding.	
Project is too expensive to deliver.	High	Medium	Working with Landscape Architects to deliver suitable design.	Consider alternative designs / costs
Geology does not allow for project delivery	High	Low	Landscape Architects know the site and have worked there before.	
Project Plan has major impact on the landscape	High	Low	Involved SNH in early stages of planning and design.	Continue to involve for SNH for advice
Project impacts on protected species or habitats	Medium	Low	SNH involved in early stages of planning, advice taken.	As above
Insufficient level of communication with stakeholders	Medium	Low	Maintaining regular contact with all stakeholders.	
Future level of site management cannot be agreed	Low	Low	Working to put management group in place.	Consider other partnerships that could deliver expertise in similar projects
Staff capacity is too low to deliver project	Low	Low	Project Officer already in post.	

## 5.5 DISPLACEMENT

MCHA must ensure that the project does not have a negative effect on existing businesses in the local area.

**Parking** As much of the work involves extending an existing car park there is limited scope for displacement. There is no public transport to the site so new parking would not be encouraging extra journeys. The only other small carpark nearby will remain free of charge but has very limited capacity and the majority of visitors seem to prefer the convenience of parking nearby.

**Toilets** There are a limited number of public toilets on Skye so it is likely any additional toilets would be welcomed.

**Concession Stand** While there is some small chance of displacement with any concession stand, the likely small size of a stand will limit the amount of choice and availability and therefore the chance of it having a serious effect on any other local business. There have been mobile outlets on site in the past without causing problems.

## 5.6 SWOT ANALYSIS

**Strengths** If visitors choose to visit the Fairy Pools, there are limited parking options. The only other parking available is small and involves walking a short distance which seems to deter many day visitors. It is a popular visitor attraction and will continue to attract visitors into the future. MCHA is building a relationship with some of the tour bus companies to provide an improved service for them and their guests. There is also the potential to further develop the area and attract different groups to the site.

MCHA has received an expression of interest from a local bike hire company who would like to see bike trails developed through the forest. There could be attraction for people interested in the history of the area or future classification as a Dark Sky Discovery site. The site therefore has strong long term potential for providing an income to the community and providing sufficient funds to maintain and protect the site.

**Weaknesses** The site is and future income is reliant on continual support from tourism, the concern is that even a small parking charge will deter some visitors. From researching similar areas that this is unlikely to happen, people want to visit places of natural beauty and enjoy the unique landscape. The continuing lack of facilities and the potential of a poor visitor experience are more likely to damage the prospects for future tourist visits than any small parking charge could.

**Opportunities** The project presents a real opportunity to generate a sustainable income for the area and deal with some long-standing problems. It also allows the community to take control of an asset which will potentially help fund other local projects. It gives MCHA the chance to develop other reasons for people to visit the area and visit other attractions locally, strengthening the local economy and providing employment opportunities. This in turn provides the community with an ability to both retain young people in the area, as there are better prospects of employment, and to attract new working age families into the region. One of the biggest challenges facing small remote rural communities is providing working age people with the jobs, opportunities and housing that they need to make a life there, currently these are very limited.

**Threats** The main threat to the project would be an inability to source funding, meaning the project is unable to progress.

It is unlikely anyone will set up a local shuttle bus service as they would still need parking, would have to charge, and would have no guarantee of business. Most tourists enjoy the freedom of having a car and being able to stop and start when they want.

There is a possibility that visitors will get tired of the lack of facilities and a poor visitor experience and choose to holiday elsewhere. This has the potential to be devastating to the economy of both Skye and the wider region. A huge number of jobs are both directly and indirectly reliant on tourism and, while many people recognise this, the lack of financial support available makes it hard to tackle.

MacLeod estate is unlikely to want or be able to develop any part of their land as parking, and have stated they support the existing project. It is unlikely the project will receive any significant financial support from them as the Fairy Pools do not directly generate any income for the estate.

## 6.0 SUPPORTING / REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The following documents are available as background information or as reference material if required.

- Brydon Associates Options Appraisal
- Forest Enterprise Project Brief – for the Steering Group
- Topographical survey for the site
- MCHA Community Survey results & comments
- Proposed Plan for the car park – as submitted for planning permission
- MCHA constitution (revised July 2017)
- Hyatt design document and cost plan
- Fairy Pools Project Plan