

PROPOSED ARGYLL AND ISLES COAST AND COUNTRYSIDE TRUST-  
AICCT

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**1.0 SUMMARY**

**1.1** This report concerns a feasibility study and public consultation that sought to inform decision making on whether the formation of a new Trust is an effective vehicle to address an emerging gap in service delivery of outdoor access physical works, tackling invasive species, small scale environmental improvements and biodiversity projects at a time of falling budgets.

**1.2** A steering group was set up with membership drawn from Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll and Bute Social Enterprise Network, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and Argyll and Bute Local Services Initiative. The steering group established a draft aim and key objectives for the proposed new Trust and engaged Small Town and Rural Development Group (STAR) to carry out the feasibility study and public consultation.

**1.3** The findings of the consultation have been included in the finalised feasibility study that accompanies this report as **Appendix A** which you can find here:-

<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=257&MId=5401&Ver=4>

The study recommends that the Trust should be established with an initial focus on a limited number of project areas based on gaps, needs and opportunities identified by local stakeholders with a strong emphasis on an “enabling role” working with and supporting existing community based groups. Key areas for the Trust to focus on would include:

- § *Developing and promoting improved access networks and related facilities and infrastructure;*
- § *Developing funding and promotion work that helps to raise the profile and activity of existing groups and of the outstanding natural environment and cultural heritage in Argyll and the Isles;*
- § *Taking a strategic lead in developing and promoting larger scale and authority wide projects and initiatives such as the control on invasive species.*

**1.4** Following a series of implemented budget cuts the council can no longer undertake a number of non-statutory works relating to the environment. The establishment of the Trust would help mitigate the impact of the cuts by acting as an independent body with charitable status in order to take advantage of numerous funding opportunities not available to the council including lottery and private sector funding. This external funding could then be used to undertake projects that the council no longer has funding for including path maintenance and ranger services. This will become particularly important following the adoption of the core path plan with the need for the council to maximise this asset for the benefit of the economy and the quality of life for local people. The primary focus of the Trust is consequently to undertake works on the ground that will provide local employment opportunities, assist in the development of further economic activity via the private sector and provide additional social benefits linked to the improvement of the environment. The creation of the Trust will also help to coordinate and assist the activities of existing community groups and take a more strategic approach to area wide initiatives such as tackling non-native invasive species. In the longer term the Trust could also have the potential to address future revenue cost pressures faced by the council.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1** That the Council agree to the establishment of the Argyll and The Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (AICCT) as an independent body for a three year period.
- 2.2** That the Council agree to funding the AICCT with £42k for the next three years (£14k per annum) to match key partners contributions that will enable the appointment of an Executive Officer for up to a three year period.
- 2.3** That the Council release of funding (£14k) be initially to allow the first year of operation of the AICCT with the subsequent release of funding (£28k) being dependant on the Trust's overall performance in relation to **Appendix B** of this report.
- 2.3** That the Council in due course nominate a Councillor to sit on the Board of the AICCT that will be subject to a further report to Council.

## **3.0 DETAIL:**

### **Background:**

**3.1** The main purpose of the feasibility study (which was partner funded) was to assess the potential establishment of the Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (AICCT) utilising the services of STAR consultants to carry out the contract under the following criteria:

- Consider the merits of establishing the Argyll & the Isles Coast & Countryside (AICCT),
- Examine possible options for the future delivery of AICCT and possible finance mechanisms,
- Facilitate a series of consultation events and activities with stakeholders, including interest community organisations, to inform and gauge potential support,
- Identify and evaluate appropriate models for the future delivery of the Trust.

**3.2** The intension of the feasibility study was to investigate the future potential of a Trust, or similar body that will form a catalyst to deliver projects intended to benefit local communities throughout Argyll and the Isles. It was perceived as the most cost effective way of delivery allied with the links with the business community, volunteer groups and those on various training schemes. The Trust mechanism will also allow a range of partners to work together through an independent body to deliver a range of projects and objectives. Collaboration with partners through the Trust is one of the key components in the establishment of the trust to deliver its aim and key objectives that were tested through the consultation process. The findings of the feasibility study are included in **Appendix A** which you can find here:-

<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=257&MId=5401&Ver=4>

The initial aim for the proposed AICCT is:

***Working together<sup>1</sup> to sustainably maintain, enhance and promote the coast & countryside of Argyll and the Isles for the benefit of communities, business and visitors.***

The proposed aim received widespread support.

#### **Key Objectives:**

The steering group established eight Key Objectives for the proposed Trust and asked stakeholders to comment on their suitability or otherwise. While all of the objectives received majority support it is proposed that the objectives be reordered to reflect opinions expressed during the consultation.

#### **The following objectives were prioritised as a result of the consultation:**

- § **Objective 1:** Maintain, manage, promote and enhance our biodiversity and historic environment;
- § **Objective 2:** Encourage, facilitate and promote responsible access to the coast and countryside;
- § **Objective 3:** Maximise external funding opportunities for the benefit of the natural and historic environment and its enjoyment;

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<sup>1</sup> This includes partnership working.

- § **Objective 4:** Encourage participation and partnership working of existing groups and sharing of best practice with local communities and partners on all matters relating to the objectives;
- § **Objective 5:** *Deliver a co-ordinated advisory service and education for the benefit of all existing community trusts and other organisations with an interest in the environment;*
- § **Objective 6:** *Create demonstrable social benefits such as opportunities for employment, training and volunteering;*
- § **Objective 7:** *Seek to create an economically sustainable business for delivery of the Coast and Countryside objectives;*
- § **Objective 8:** *The Trust may work with transnational partners or neighbouring authorities where opportunities exist to meet its objectives.*

## Legal Structure

**3.3** While there are a range of other options that could be considered we would recommend that the Trust should be established either as a charitable company limited by guarantee or as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO).

## Governance

**3.4 Membership and Board of Directors** It is recommended that the Argyll & Isles Coast and Countryside Trust develops a ‘two tier structure’ with an open approach to membership but that it also specifies a number of key organisations as having the right to ‘appoint’ directors. This will both maintain a link to existing grassroots organisations and provide a link to key organisations (Argyll and Bute Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, ABSEN). We would recommend membership for: community groups, businesses, public agencies, national organisations and individuals. In appointing a board we would recommend that there is a balance of elected board members over appointed directors – and that the elected directors reflect some form of equity across the four administrative areas of Argyll and Bute.

**As an example, a Board of 8 could be made up as follows:**

- § **4 community based elected directors** drawn from the membership (1 from each of the 4 areas)
- § **4 appointed directors** (Scottish Natural Heritage, Argyll and Bute Council, Forestry Commission Scotland, NHS Highland)

**3.5 Finance:** The Trust should aim to become financially sustainable over a 3 – 5 year period. This will be one of its major challenges. It is clear however from the experience of other Trusts that initial core funding from partners is needed to establish and support the Trust in its early years. Key

Partners have committed £70k (SNH £25k; Forestry Commission £15k and NHS Highland £30k) over the next three financial years to support the core activities of the AICCT with additional monies being identified from project budgets to tackle specific projects. It is proposed that the council make a contribution of £42k (£14k per annum to pay for staffing and general administration costs including travel expenses, postage, promotional literature etc.) over the next 3 financial years to match these funds. SNH have also agreed to host the new Executive Officer in their area offices within Argyll and Bute. Negotiations with Historic Scotland and the private sector are continuing to deliver additional funds.

### **Benefits to the Council and Wider Area**

**3.6** Following a series of implemented budget cuts the council can no longer undertake a number of non-statutory works relating to the environment. The establishment of the Trust would help mitigate the impact of the cuts by acting as an independent body with charitable status in order to take advantage of numerous funding opportunities not available to the council including lottery and private sector funding. This external funding could then be used to undertake projects that the council no longer has funding for including path maintenance and ranger services. This will become particularly important following the adoption of the core path plan with the need for the council to maximise this asset for the benefit of the economy and the quality of life for local people.

**3.7** The primary focus of the proposed Trust is to undertake works on the ground that will provide local employment opportunities, assist the development of further economic activity via the private sector and provide additional social benefits linked to the improvement of the environment. The creation of the Trust will also help to coordinate and assist the activities of existing community groups, attract much needed external funding to Argyll and Bute and take a more strategic approach to area wide initiatives such as tackling non-native invasive species.

**3.8** It should also be noted that the activities of the Trust will extend to the full geographic area of Argyll and Bute including the area of our authority covered by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. This partnership approach with the park authority also has the potential to help direct significant funds to our area through cooperation with their own recently established Trust.

### **Staffing**

**3.8** The Trust should seek funding to appoint its own staff and in the first instance should appoint an Executive Officer with marketing and fundraising skills.

## **4.0 NEXT STEPS**

**4.1** It is intended to ask the council for agreement in principle to establish the AICCT for a three year period subject to range of actions to be delivered in its

first year of operation. These key first year actions have been identified in **Appendix B** of this report and will be subject of a further report to council one year from the commencement of the Trust to measure overall performance and value for money. The remaining funds will all the partners including the council only be released following satisfactory progress with regard to the Action Plan.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The feasibility study results lead us to conclude that:

- § There is strong support for establishing the Trust – but it needs to take full account of concerns expressed in the consultation on how it is established and run and how it works with existing groups.
- § Its proposed aim and objectives are seen to be fit for purpose – but the objectives should be re-ordered to reflect the strength of support expressed during the consultation.
- § Top priorities for the work of the Trust should be linked to developing and promoting access networks, and raising funds to support work on the natural and historic environment in Argyll and the Isles.
- § There is scope for the Trust to work to enable local groups, but also to take a strategic view and co-ordinate larger scale partnership bids for funding and development of priority projects.
- § The Trust should be established as an independent charitable company.
- § It should encourage a wide grassroots membership from the outset.
- § Its board of directors should have a mix of elected and appointed directors.
- § There will need to secure commitment from key partners to provide core funding for its establishment and to provide capital funding in its early years.
- § There is potential for the Trust to develop a ‘mixed economy’ business model with a mix of core funding from the public, private and charitable sectors, project funding, and income generation,
- § The evidence from other Trusts is that the proposed Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust can provide a cost effective partnership for agencies, communities, businesses and volunteers to work together to add real value to the local environment, heritage and economy.

## 6.0 IMPLICATIONS

**5.1 Policy:** The establishment of the Trust would assist in the delivery of a number of key outcomes contained within the single outcome agreement.

**5.2 Financial:** as a Strategic Stakeholder and working in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and the National Health Service, Argyll and Bute Council will be expected to make a financial contribution to core and project funding over the next three years met through the Development and Infrastructure budget.

**5.3 Legal:** assist with setting up of the trust with regard to the option chosen

**5.4 HR:** possible assistance may be required.

**5.5 Equalities:** policy to be adopted by the trust

**5.6 Risk:** the feasibility study illustrates majority support with caveats; the risk to the trust is manageable

**5.7 Customer Service:** Staff will be employed to deliver this.

## 6.0 APPENDICES

**6.1 Appendix A** containing the Full Feasibility Report which you can be found at

<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=257&MId=5401&Ver=4> and **Appendix B** containing the Action Plan.

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## Appendix B

### Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust- Action Plan

#### Vision Statement

*'Working together to sustainably maintain, enhance and promote the coast & countryside of Argyll and the Isles for the benefit of communities, business and visitors'.*

