

IONA 2013 CELEBRATIONS UPDATE

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1** This paper sets out the background to the Iona 2013 Celebrations and the key role the Council is playing in assisting stakeholders in preparing for this event of national importance.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1** That members note the content of this paper.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Iona is a world renowned destination for its religious and cultural history and it is recorded that despite its small size, Iona attracts well in excess of 100,000 visitors every year, including many international visitors undertaking religious and non-religious pilgrimages; the population of Iona is only 150. Consequently, Iona is one of the most popular visitor destinations in Argyll and Bute and in addition, is now attracting a growing number of cruise ships.

- 2.2** The year 2013 marks the 1,450th anniversary of the arrival of St. Columba on the Isle of Iona which is well established as the origins of Christianity in Scotland. There is growing interest in celebrating this key anniversary with the lead being taken by the Iona Community, a Scottish Christian ecumenical society, with significant input from partners such as Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, Caledonian MacBrayne, VisitScotland and the Council.

- 2.3** The Iona Community are responsible for the invitations and attending dignitaries includes representatives of the devolved governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland, and also national Scottish church leaders.

- 2.4** The principle event is a special service of the Pentecost at Iona Abbey on Sunday **19 May 2013** followed by the opening of the new Historic Scotland museum at the Abbey.

2.5 It should be noted that the service is not a public event and is open to invitees only. Due to the profile of the attending political dignitaries, security will be a key issue. The isle of Iona will obviously be open for business as usual with exception to some restrictions on access to the Abbey during the Pentecost service which will be in the afternoon.

2.6 The Council is performing two key roles in respect of the celebrations. Since March 2012, the Development and Infrastructure department have been liaising with key stakeholders and other public partners to improve the visitor infrastructure.

2.7 The second role relates specifically to the organising of the principle event including contingency planning, logistics and liaising with the other key stakeholders. Whilst the Iona Community is the lead partner, the Council is providing officer support to assist the lead partner in ensuring that the event goes smoothly.

2.8 There will be a series of other events on Iona from Easter to autumn during 2013 which will be widely promoted, therefore it is anticipated that there will be an increase on the number of visitors to Iona during 2013.

2.9 The Iona 2013 Celebrations provides a platform of national importance which showcases Argyll and Bute to a national and international audience. The benefits to improving the visitor infrastructure for 2013 includes increased positive media exposure.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The Iona 2013 Celebrations presents a good opportunity to showcase Argyll and Bute as a destination in respect of culture, religious history and tourism to a potential national and international audience. The Council is liaising with the Iona Community and a range of other stakeholders to ensure that the event is well managed and that positive exposure is maximised.

4. IMPLICATIONS

Policy: Within the Corporate Plan, a strategic objective is promoting our cultural, social and natural heritage and protecting our unique area.

Within the Economic Development Action Plan a key outcome is to move the tourism industry up the value chain, extend the season and improve its profile and

propositions.

Financial: Costs are being met from existing budgets.

Personnel: Officer time to deliver the actions and represent the Council at meetings on Iona.

Equal Opportunity: None

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