

**REPORT BY POLICY LEAD FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH
(ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, RENEWABLES AND
STRATEGIC TOURISM)**

1. INTRODUCTION

This is my second report as Policy Lead for Sustainable Economic Growth (Economic Development, European Affairs, Renewables and Strategic Tourism) and covers the period from 1st June 2015 to 31st December 2015.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members note the Report.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Economic Forum

The work of the Argyll & Bute Economic Forum continues, with the Chair leading on the development of the Forum and spending a significant amount of time ensuring that local issues are raised with organisations and individuals at a national and strategic level. At the November meeting an outline of the report that the Chair of the Economic Forum will submit to the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership was discussed. This will set out the key considerations of the forum in relation to barriers and opportunities for growing our economy. I look forward to seeing the full report which will be available early in 2016. It was also confirmed that Nicholas Ferguson CBE is keen to remain as the Chair of the Economic Forum in 2016 but on a slightly less frequent basis meeting twice instead of four times over the year.

3.1.1 August 2015 Meeting

The third full meeting of the forum was held at Portavadie Marina and after it concluded, Forum members were given a tour of the new spa facility now available. This very significant investment in Cowal is a reassuring signal of confidence in tourism investment for Argyll and Bute.

Highlights from this meeting included:-

- a review of the HIE report 'Young People and the Highlands and Islands; Attitudes and Aspirations' (available online: <http://www.hie.co.uk/common/handlers/download-document.ashx?id=05bcaa8e-4b9d-4f3d-8904-3f3c98063f80>)
- an update, by the Chair, on his group meetings with industry representatives from the tourism and food industries over the summer to hear their views on job creation for Argyll and Bute within their sectors
- an overview from Council officers on:
 - the Council's approach to economic development and job creation
 - our plans for our main towns e.g. CHORD, Lorn Arc etc.

- how the Council supports businesses in Argyll and Bute
- a very constructive discussion on the very poor mobile phone connectivity in Argyll and Bute including lack of 3G and 4G connectivity and how it is having an adverse impact on growing our economy

3.1.2 **November 2015 Meeting**

I attended the fourth full meeting of the Forum on 18th November at the Ardgartan Hotel on the shores of Loch Long, courtesy of the owner who was our host for the day. Similarly to Portavadie, this is another significant investment in our tourism asset, designed to capitalise on our fantastic natural assets.

Highlights from the meeting included:-

- a review of findings to date, in respect of the 3 areas of focus; tourism, food and drink and youth and education
- a presentation from the Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC) covering the findings from 'google analytics' on the online profile (or lack of) of 'Argyll' when compared to other destinations such as Loch Lomond, the Lake District, Scotland and others. Our very low profile highlights the scale of the challenge in promoting our region as a destination in the digital age
- a presentation from the Head of Community and Culture on the availability of housing in Argyll and Bute
- feedback from the Chair on his investigations into how we can improve mobile phone connectivity in Argyll and Bute for business

There was also brief discussion about the fact that, following the 2011 census, Argyll and Bute was one of four Scottish local authorities (all of them located in the west) with a declining population. However, the other three authorities will be part of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley City deal while Argyll and Bute is not. As the focus for City Deals is on infrastructure it is important that we find a way to create the same advantage – whether through existing innovations such as the TIF scheme in the Oban and Lorn area or identifying alternative proposals. The development of the Council's Strategic Infrastructure Plan (SIP) will be an important document in terms of stimulating a wider discussion and lobbying the UK and Scottish Government for additional economic assistance.

3.2 **WIDER BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT**

While the Economic Forum is an important route of trying to ensure private sector engagement in the work now ongoing, the EKOS report identified that most businesses in Argyll and Bute are either small- or micro-businesses. There have been a number of different approaches taken to ensure the widest possible engagement with businesses across the area.

3.2.1 **Business Breakfast/Lunch Meetings**

The Head of Economic Development, along with members of the Business Gateway team, has been meeting with Argyll businesses during November and December. These meetings have taken place in Campbeltown, Oban, Inveraray, Helensburgh, Lochgilphead, Rothesay and Dunoon. These meetings are intended to help share information between the council and the local business community.

Each meeting begins with a presentation on the Council's economic initiatives and investments in each area, an overview of the compelling skills study and the work of the Economic Forum. The second part of the meeting involves open discussions on the content of the presentation and any other questions people attending the meeting wished to ask. Topics discussed included procurement, digital connectivity, engaging young people, improving skills, planning issues, improving the voice of the private sector in Argyll, ferries, marketing activities and the need to attract new employers to our area.

I attended the meetings held in Helensburgh and Lochgilphead and the feedback was very positive with businesses wanting to play a part in growing the economy. A total of 107 business representatives attended these meetings and there are plans to hold follow up meetings in six months time.

3.2.2 **Entrepreneurial Women**

In October Helensburgh Community Council, working with Business Gateway and Women's Enterprise Scotland, held an event for female entrepreneurs ('Believe in Yourself') in the Victoria Halls in Helensburgh which I attended for part of the day. The Council's Chief Executive, Sally Loudon, opened the event and key speakers were the Chief Executive of Women's Enterprise Scotland (WES) and ambassadors for WES. There was a good combination of speakers, workshop sessions and networking opportunities and Business Gateway outlined the support available to Entrepreneurs.

Many who attended reported that they felt more confident and were encouraged to be more proactive in building their business. Some participants made good contacts that will be of benefit to them going forward. It was encouraging that Business Gateway and Argyll and Bute Council are perceived increasingly positively as playing an important role in encouraging business development. The event also generated enthusiasm for networking meetings in Helensburgh; and Helensburgh Community Council are now working with Helensburgh and Lomond Chamber of Commerce to find a sustainable way to progress this.

3.2.3 **Place-based Visits**

In August, ahead of the full Community Planning Partnership meeting at Machrihanish, I spent a day visiting businesses in the Campbeltown Area. I met with/visited the following businesses: Machrihanish Airbase Community Company; MERL/Marine Harvest; Southworth Development (seeing both the Ugdale and Royal hotels; plus I participated in a conference call with senior management in America); Springbank distillery. I also had a tour of some of the most significant developments in Campbeltown (with one of the local Council officers) such as the new harbour facility and the town centre regeneration work that had been completed and is ongoing.

In January I hope to visit a number of Helensburgh and Lomond businesses, facilitated by Business Gateway, with visits to our other main towns to be planned for the future.

3.3 TOURISM

3.3.1 Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative (AITC)

I met with the AITC development officer and two board members at the end of July to discuss their action since the Council agreed three years' core funding in February 2014; and their planned activity over the next year. AITC have since been represented at the Members Seminar held in October and presented to the full Council in November, which gave a broad overview to all members of their work – in particular highlighting the development of their Tourism “Rocket” which was launched at Machrihanish Airbase. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the Taste for Tourism event in Oban in November, with the Council Leader representing the Council, but the feedback on the event has been incredibly positive and AITC's next major event will be their Tourism Summit to be held in Helensburgh in March.

3.3.2 Love Loch Lomond (LLL)

Love Loch Lomond covers the Helensburgh and Lomond area of Argyll and Bute, providing some overlap with the activity undertaken by AITC. In November I attended a “Collaboration” meeting organised by LLL to discuss the potential for partnership working – both in the broadest sense and specifically in relation funding bids. A number of organisations including West Dunbartonshire Council, the National Trust for Scotland and the RSPB were present as well as local businesses. At the meeting their “rocket” model was circulated and their main themes tie in well with our wider Argyll & Bute area tourism priorities. I also attended the LLL AGM in December which included some very interesting presentations from members who had participated in an industry visit to Iceland.

3.3.3 Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design 2016

I attended the industry launch for the new “Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design” in Edinburgh in October. The event highlighted the potential opportunities available to businesses and launched the 2016 toolkit on www.visitscotland.org which has been designed to assist businesses to prepare for next year.

The launch event for the Festival of Architecture will take place in Argyll and Bute in March at St Peter's Seminary in Cardross with NVA running the Hinterland event over ten days. This is expected to bring a significant number of visitors into the Helensburgh area and I have had a number of meetings with a range of individuals/organisations to discuss how the maximum benefit can be brought to the local area. In addition to the potential benefit of this initial event it may be possible to look at a longer term programme of events over 2016 benefiting from national marketing support (such as the Doors Open Day events in September).

Working with NVA, AITC, LLL and the Helensburgh and Lomond Chamber of Commerce it has been agreed to hold a meeting for local businesses in January, hosted by all three member organisations. In addition to the specific opportunity available this spring I would hope to see these organisations work together on a continued basis building on the planned cultural trail, Clyde Sea Lochs, creative industries, etc.

In addition to the event in Cardross there is the potential for significant additional

benefit to Argyll and Bute across 2016 if businesses are able to build on the focussed marketing opportunities that the “Year of ...” brings. For example, in December the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) released their list of the top 100 buildings in Scotland from the last century with the public being able to vote for their favourite from the spring. This list features seven properties in Argyll and Bute – with three of them on Bute.

At the industry launch event an attendee list was distributed for reference and networking purposes. I have since been in touch with Natural Retreats (whose Head of Technical Services spoke at the event about their approach in the Cairngorms) regarding their plans for development in Argyll and Bute and hope to meet with them in the New Year.

3.3.4 **Culture and Heritage**

Obviously Cllr Currie and Cllr Kinniburgh have the key policy lead roles for Culture and Heritage but considering the range and quality of culture and heritage across Argyll and Bute, it is also an area of interest to the Economic Development team, with enormous potential particularly in relation to the Tourism industry.

In August I visited Kilmartin Museum, following confirmation of their successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid, to see the work currently ongoing; and to hear about their ambitious plan for the future. Kilmartin is a site of international importance in its own right but is also part of a wider story of Scottish and Christian history. Officers from Community and Culture Services, with support from the European Team, are looking at developing an inter-regional funding proposal under the Atlantic Area programme. The focus is on culture and heritage links throughout the Atlantic Area including the west coast of Argyll and Bute. Whilst the proposal is at an early stage of development, the theme currently being explored is Christian heritage and St Columba; with the potential to develop a culture and heritage trail based on this theme.

On the day I visited Kilmartin, I also met a representative from Artmap Argyll at Kilmory, to discuss the potential wider benefits that the development of our creative industries could bring. This picked up on the discussion I had with AITC back in July about how we could best enhance our existing tourism offer using every resource available to us.

3.4 **EUROPEAN ISSUES**

3.4.1 **European Policy and Funding**

A European Policy and Funding Update paper was on the EDI Committee agenda in November and provides useful and detailed information for members for updating purposes on European funding (ESIF and Leader), Highlands and Islands European Partnership (HIEP), and West of Scotland European Funding (WoSEF) and Audit visits and reports. As European funding becomes available, regular reports will be brought to the EDI committee.

3.4.2 **Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR)**

I attended the 43rd General Assembly of the CPMR, 4-6 November in Florence,

Italy, with the Senior Development Officer (Europe). For background, the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) is a network of around 160 regions representing 24 countries. The CPMR network brings regions on the periphery of Europe together to form a strong voice used to influence European policy making and implementation.

Its focus is on social, economic and territorial cohesion; aiming to ensure that the quality of life, economic performance, life and work opportunities, for those living in Europe's peripheral areas, are equal to those living in Europe's stronger and better performing economic centres. This is done by seeking to influence policy making and delivery so that it is not disadvantageous to its member regions. European governance, energy and climate change are also topics which are of interest to the CPMR and its members.

Attendance at the Assembly was helpful for me, as Policy Lead, in understanding better European priorities, the funding mechanisms and; most importantly, the potential to align aspects of our Economic Development Plan with some of the European initiatives. In these very challenging financial times for local government, it is essential that we optimise any available funding into Argyll and Bute to enable us to realise some of our ambitions for Economic and Population growth.

At the 43rd General Assembly, the topics of migration, accessibility and transport, post 2020 Cohesion Policy reform, energy and climate, and maritime policy were discussed. An outline of the key sessions and the messages from each is summarised below.

CPMR Policy Position on Migration Management

The issue of migration was discussed in great detail with members agreeing key action points to undertake of their own accord, and collective items which they will pursue with the European Commission. Some CPMR member regions are at the forefront of the migration crisis, being the first point of arrival for many of those arriving into Europe. The debate and discussion around this issue included a keynote address from the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management as well speakers from the Greek and Italian local authorities that are dealing with an unprecedented level of refugees arriving on their shores.

The CPMR regions agreed to call for: a global integrated approach to address the current migration crisis and its roots; more solidarity and support to Mediterranean regions; re-examination of EU migration policy and improvement of legal migration channels; a considerable increase of efforts and resources dedicated to the socio-economic integration of migrants and specific actions to promote their self-employment; and stronger participation of regions in the consultation and decisional processes for migration and development. In addition, they wish to impress upon the European Commission the need to accelerate the revision of the Dublin Regulation in a way that would ensure a fairer share of the burden and responsibility among Member States; and further simplify and accelerate the process of distributing European funds for migrants.

Connecting Europe's Peripheries: Accessibility

CPMR campaigns for improved accessibility for peripheral and remote regions, this being viewed as key to achieving balanced economic development in the European Union; yet this remains an area where Europe's peripheral regions still have serious issues. This means that the contribution of these regions to the European economy is hindered and likewise the growth of these regions is restricted.

As of January 2014, the European Union has a new transport infrastructure policy that connects the continent between East and West, North and South. This policy aims to close the gaps between Member States' transport networks, remove bottlenecks that still hamper the smooth functioning of the internal market and overcome technical barriers such as incompatible standards for railway traffic. This project will help the economy in its recovery and to grow, with a budget of €24.05 billion up to 2020. However, the CPMR have expressed disappointment that the policy concentrates on Core Network Corridors and discriminates against the islands, remote peninsulas and outermost regions.

In the Final Declaration of the conference the regions have called for more involvement in co-ordinating the implementation of the TEN-T programme. During the Assembly, the European Commission spoke on this topic. In response to a question by Highland Council, the speaker clarified that although the TEN-T network extends to Glasgow and Edinburgh, the rest of Scotland could apply for DG MOVE money as a capillary region feeding the TEN-T network. The funding would be from a budget which is separate to that for the main TEN-T corridors. The fund focuses on bridging missing links, removing bottlenecks, innovation (eg e-mobility) and horizontal themes. This update provided new information to the Scottish attendees and is something that the European Team are looking into. If it is possible to take this forward, it is likely to require close working with the Scottish Government.

Cohesion Policy

The result of structural fund reforms has meant that during the 2014-2020 programming period, many Member States now have a stronger role, meaning less regional influence. The Cohesion session focused on the post 2020 Cohesion programmes. During this session the **Juncker Plan** was discussed. This is a source of European loan funding available for large scale strategic projects. Within the UK, the government are leading on applications for the loan fund. The CPMR UK members enquired how they could find out what has been applied for at European level, and how they could influence/benefit from investments. This is something which HIEP may pursue.

UK Members Meeting

A fringe meeting to the General Assembly was held by UK members of the CPMR. One of the interesting points of discussion was the establishment of a Cornwall Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) programme. The Highlands and Islands had unsuccessfully pursued a similar programme with the Scottish Government and members noted with interest the developments in Cornwall. HIEP are considering whether or not to raise the Cornish example with the Scottish Government.

Commission Meetings

The Senior Development Officer and I also attended meetings of the Atlantic Arc Commission (of which Argyll and Bute is a member) and the Islands Commission (of which we are not a member but are permitted to attend). Both meetings covered areas of interest including “blue” innovation and the transportation needs of the outermost regions

3.5 PROJECTS AND RENEWABLES

3.5.1 Allenergy

I attended the Allenergy AGM in October, followed by a Board meeting and attended a further Board meeting in December. The Board has gone through a number of changes recently with a significant number of new members and a new, interim Chair.

Matters discussed at the Allenergy meetings have included updates on the Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland: Area-based Schemes (HEEPS: ABS), providing financial support for householders to insulate their home, the Affordable Warmth in Argyll project and the involvement of Allenergy in the development of the Algal Solutions for Local Energy Economies proposal; which they will be continuing to support although not taking a leading role in. This project aims to develop a model for local circular energy economies by using renewable electricity to produce high value products from algae, including carbon neutral liquid fuels. This is of particular benefit in remote rural areas with grid constraints.

3.6 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

3.6.1 Argyll College / UHI

The Council agreed in November 2015 to the removal of Council-appointed Board members. This request was made by the College as part of their progress in terms of updating and developing their governance procedures. During the period of this report, I attended College Board Meetings in June and September and a Finance and General Purpose Committee meeting in September.

In October, I attended the College Board’s Development Day, where the theme was “Achieving Excellence: Strong Governance, Clear Direction”. The objectives for the day were as follow:-

- Improve board members’ knowledge of their roles and responsibilities
- Provide clarity of legal responsibilities of Company director and charity trustee
- Build team working skills following recruitment of new Board members
- Improve knowledge of external environment: FE and HE sectors
- Engage Board members and senior staff in dialogue over development of an ambitious but realistic Strategic Plan.

In addition, in my role as a Board member for the College, I attended the College Board Members’ Day run by the College Development Network in Edinburgh in June. This provided an opportunity for networking as well as speeches, including

from the Cabinet Secretary for Education. I also attended workshops on funding and governance.

3.6.2 **Oban - University Town**

Work is progressing to further develop Oban as a University Town - to serve Argyll and the wider west coast of the Highlands. A report has been completed by Armani consultants, who are based in Oban, on the feasibility of taking this initiative forward through a partnership formed with HIE, the council, Argyll College, SAMs and the UHI. Actions are now being developed by the partnership to implement the report's key recommendations that focussed on creating new student accommodation and other college facilities; improving the management of the town to ensure an increase in students is a positive experience for everyone; reaching an international audience with new courses; improving branding and creating new cultural activity in the town.

This work included the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including the local community and students. It is intended to report to the EDI committee early in 2016 on the detailed findings of the report and how its implementation will be taken forward. This work was funded by HIE with a contribution from the council.

3.7 **COSLA**

3.7.1 **Development, Economy & Sustainability Executive Group**

Since my last report I have attended two COSLA Executive Group meetings in Edinburgh. All items taken in public session are available from the COSLA website, using this link: <http://www.cosla.gov.uk/events/previous>.

The meeting on 18th September featured a very substantial agenda covering the following:-

Private session items

DES Executive Group Business Plan; Business Gateway Annual Review; Business Gateway Strategic Review; Scotland's Economic Strategy: the role and contribution of local government; Household Recycling Charter and Code of Practice; Circular Economy Consultations; Ofcom Digital Communications Consultation; Planning Modernisation, Performance and Resourcing; National Transport Strategy Refresh; Roads Collaboration; Procurement Reform; Trade and Investment Strategy; Rural Summit; EU Energy Efficient Buildings

Public Session Items

Timber Transport Forum and Strategic Timber Transport Fund; Road Safety Reviews; Historic Environment Strategy; Paris Climate Change Summit; Onshore Wind Generation; Brown Tourist Signposting; Consultation on SEPA Charging Scheme

Items for Noting

Flooding Update; EU Policy Update; Planning Update; Zero Waste Update; Economic Development, Regeneration and Tourism update; Climate Change Update; Roads and Transport Update

The meeting on Friday 20th November included the following items:-

Private Session Items

DES Executive Group Business Planning Paper; Business Gateway Strategic Review; Fairer Scotland; Household Recycling Charter and Code of Practice; Independent Review of Planning; National Transport Strategy Refresh; Roads Collaboration; Procurement Reform; Broadband and Digital; Road Safety Framework – mid-term review.

Public Session Items

Primary Authority and Regulatory Reform update; Safety at Public Events; Footpath Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill; Historic Environment Strategy; European Policy Update; European Covenant of Mayors.

Items for Noting

Zero Waste Update; Economic Development, Regeneration and Tourism update; Climate Change Update; Roads and Transport Update

Following the November meeting I was invited to be part of the Business Gateway Review Working Group, which is expected to meet in January and February.

3.8 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

3.8.1 Machrihanish UK Spaceport

At the June Council meeting a consortium between the Council and Machrihanish Airbase Community Company (MACC) was agreed, to support the potential bid for Machrihanish to become the site of the UK's first spaceport. The Council is continuing to work with MACC and HIE to establish a business case that proves Machrihanish would be the best place for this exciting development to take place. With a 3km runway, an abundance of developable land, uncluttered airspace and close proximity to engineering expertise in both Northern Ireland and the Central Belt, Machrihanish offers a number of district advantages as a potential spaceport.

Specialist consultants have been employed to help prepare the business case and also look for new opportunities to develop the base further and attract new employment activities. Ideas include producing more renewable energy and offering new educational facilities. The consultants are also contacting the private sector associated with the growing UK space industry to help stimulate interest in Machrihanish.

In September I attended a meeting at Machrihanish Airbase with representatives from MACC, HIE, the Council and the specialist consultants, to meet with representatives from the UK Space Agency; letting them see in person, the potential of both the Airbase site and the wider Campbeltown/Kintyre area. The criteria for round two of the bidding process is now expected to be released at the start of the new year. At this point a decision will be taken whether to continue with the bid which will involve both the Council and MACC as consortium

partners, with advice from HIE.

3.8.2 **Community Regeneration**

The Council's work on town centre regeneration; through initiatives such as the CHORD programme, Townscape Heritage and Conservation Area Regeneration Schemes, has seen significant success and is still ongoing. Argyll and Bute is an area made up of many small communities and work is also taking place to ensure that wherever opportunity exists for a community group to drive forward economic development and regeneration, they are supported. There have been a number of steps forward in this regard recently:

- Tiree has been successful in their bid for Scottish Government funding to undertake an economic study for the island, with additional supporting funding coming from the Council, HIE and Tiree Windfall Fund
- A Memorandum Of Understanding with Scottish Canals was recently agreed by the EDI committee and charrette funding for the canal redevelopment has been secured from the Scottish Government; with additional supporting funding provided by the Council and Scottish Canals
- Alliance for Bute has secured £25k charrette funding from the Scottish Government with additional funds coming from Bute Estates and officer support from the Council. A part time facilitator position to support the Alliance for Action, which is being funded by Scotland's Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF), is currently being advertised with a closing date of 8th January
- SURF are now looking towards Dunoon to facilitate a similar project there; and as such, support will be provided in order that the appropriate introductions are made to ensure wide participation and community buy-in from the outset.

3.8.3 **Other activities**

In addition to the wide range of formal partnership arrangements the Council participates in, such as CoSLA and COHI, there is also action taken to ensure that we promote the strengths of the area and identify potential joint working wherever possible. As reported in other Leader/Policy Lead reports, I participated in the visit by David Stewart, MSP and accompanied him on his visit to Oban where we visited SAMS, viewed the impact of the CHORD work and officers highlighted to Mr Stewart the growth potential of TIF scheme for the Oban area.

At the start of June, officers from Economic Development met with representatives from North Ayrshire Council and I joined part of that meeting. The aim of the meeting was to identify common interests, potential for joint lobbying and also to establish whether partnership working could be beneficial for both our areas with a focus on improving transport links, improving skills for work and marketing of our key tourism assets.

3.9 **STRATEGIC IT**

There have been a number of national consultations in relation to digital infrastructure which the Council has responded to; these were reported to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in November.

3.9.1 **Broadband**

Work continues on the rollout of next generation broadband through both the Highlands and Islands and Rest of Scotland programmes. With some coverage available in all of our main towns as well as some of our rural settlements, around half of all residences are now covered. There is however still more to be done and 2016 is expected to extend superfast broadband coverage across remaining parts of our towns and into more rural areas, including some of our islands. In addition, the Council was notified in December that BT have upgraded the Helensburgh exchange which will significantly increase the maximum speed customers on a non-fibre broadband service will receive.

For areas that won't be included in the main fibre rollout programmes, Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) continue to work with local communities. I met with them in September to discuss their Giga Plus Argyll project which will provide next generation connections to around 1,400 premises. At that point, they had a significant number of registrations of interest and were expecting first deployment in Mull in early 2016. CBS are also working with the Colintrave and Glendaruel Development Trust on a potential Kyles of Bute project but first need to identify where the fibre rollout will reach. It was reassuring to hear that CBS are in contact with other organisations such as Arqiva and Airwaves to discuss partnership working as this should ensure maximum benefit for the local area.

3.9.2 **Public Wi-Fi**

During September, a contract was awarded to BroadChord, an organisation based in Helensburgh, to progress a pilot for public Wi-Fi provision in the town centre. The first phase of development was for provision in Colquhoun Square which is now up and running and we will be continuing to work with BroadChord to see this extended to other parts of the town centre. Once there has been time to evaluate the success of this project, the potential to roll this out in other areas will be considered. Officers also continue to communicate with Scottish Futures Trust regarding the possibility of Wi-Fi provided through Scottish Government involvement.

3.9.3 **Mobile Telephony**

Whilst the improvements we hoped to see through the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) have not been realised, due to technical constraints, we continue to press for improvements to mobile coverage, both in terms of those areas with coverage and the availability of data connections. Following the successful delivery of the new mobile mast on Coll, making it the first Scottish island to benefit from a 4G mobile signal, we are continuing to work with Scottish Futures Trust to see whether a similar project could be delivered elsewhere in Argyll – and using the information from the MIP work to identify suitable areas.

In August, I met (along with Economic Development, IT and Planning officers) with representatives from CTIL, who represent Vodafone and O2. They explained their plans for extending 4G coverage through their existing mast infrastructure; and we hope to see further progress during 2016.

4 **CONCLUSION**

It is difficult to capture the full range of activities undertaken over the last six months in this report so I have focussed on external meetings and events. An important part of my role is making sure I am aware of significant developments across Argyll and Bute and I'd like to thank the many officers who have provided briefings as necessary, although much of that work is not picked up within this paper.

Councillor Aileen Morton

Policy Lead for Sustainable Economic Growth (Economic Development, European Affairs, Renewables and Strategic Tourism)

1st January 2016