

Area Community Planning Group- Oban Lorn and the Isles

Date: 19 May 2016

Agenda Item: 9(d)

The economy is diverse and thriving – Oban University Town Progress Report



The ambition for Oban University Town to be a transformational project for Oban and the surrounding area has attracted broad based support, and the commitment of a multi-agency team committed to its delivery. It also has the support of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership and the Argyll and Bute Economic Forum Report, released in February 2016, specifically mentions and fully endorses the proposal.

The Oban University Town Steering Group has been formed to oversee delivery. It has representation from the key organisations with responsibility for delivering this exciting ambition: HIE, Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll College UHI, SAMS UHI, and the University of the Highlands and Islands. Skills Development Scotland and Oban High School have also accepted invitations to join the group. Business engagement will be encouraged.

In summer 2015, HIE commissioned Imani Development to deliver a Study Tour for the Oban University Town Steering Group. The tour comprised three visits each of which formed the basis of a case study investigating the development of selected coastal towns – Falmouth, Aberystwyth and St Andrews. The visits investigated how these towns successfully achieved their status and what success mean from a variety of perspectives and for different stakeholders. The report, a copy of which is available on request, made seven recommendations which have been adopted by the Steering Group as the activities which will be required to deliver Oban University Town. They are:

- 1. Developing the academic offer**
- 2. Effective town management**
- 3. Branding**
- 4. Economic contribution**
- 5. Internationalisation**
- 6. Accommodation and infrastructure**
- 7. Creativity and culture as a mode of engagement**

The Steering Group has prioritised and are delivering number of work streams from these recommendations – specifically in ‘Developing the Academic Offer’ and ‘Accommodation’. These work streams will provide secure foundations and make the case for further curriculum development at Argyll College UHI and SAMS, and at the same time identify the accommodation requirements over the next 2-3 years and a range of options for development are currently being considered. It is anticipated that there will be new accommodation available for the start of the new academic year in September 2016, and for the following year. It is anticipated that additional accommodation will be secured for around 80 students this year. Finally, whilst the branding for the project as a whole is still to be developed, the intention is to arrange some interim signage to reflect the designation of Oban as a university town.

Lucinda Gray, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
On behalf of the Oban University Town Steering Group