

**Management Committee**

**Date: 20 December 2016**



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## **Argyll and Bute Economic Forum**

### **1.0 Purpose**

To provide an update and commentary on the Argyll and Bute Economic Forum.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

To note the content of this report including updates on sector specific workgroups of the forum.

### **3.0 Background**

A mandate was established at the CPP Economic Summit in October 2014 to create the Argyll and Bute Economic Forum which was established early 2015. A private sector led organisation facilitated and supported by the public sector, their report issued in February 2016 provides a compelling overview and key recommendations to growing the economy by building on economic sectors where it is determined that sustainable job creation opportunities exist; namely tourism and food and drink. The report also sets out considerations to barriers to growth and an overview of our main towns.

### **4.0 Detail**

- 4.1 Nicholas Ferguson CBE, Chair of the Forum presented the findings of the report to the CPP Management Committee at their meeting on the 24 March 2016. The Council's Corporate Support Manager and Head of Economic Development equally presented the report to the Community Planning Groups over the spring.
- 4.2 The forum now meets twice a year to monitor the recommendations with the first in 2016 on the 14 April. It was agreed to prioritise the recommendations within each sector of the report as follows;

#### 4.3 **Tourism**

- Marketing
- Upping the game (Facilities, Activities)
- Kilmartin World Heritage

4.4 **Food Production and Aquaculture;** as there are a shorter number of recommendations within this sector, it was agreed all the following are priorities.

##### **Aquaculture**

- Stay close to the decision makers
- Consent process speeded up
- Expand shellfish
- Raise Argyll's share
- Collaboration with academic sector

##### **Food**

- Umbrella food brand
- Target food services
- Meat processing plant

#### 4.5 **Youth and Education**

- Regular visits to schools by employers.
- Young Enterprise Scotland in all schools.
- Expand UHI / Argyll College / SAMS.
- Oban as a University Town.
- University Student Accommodation.

4.6 Under **Barriers**, the following key issues were prioritised:

- A shared vision.
- Mobile connectivity.
- A83.

4.7 The second meeting of the forum was held on the 03 October with the morning dedicated to a joint session with the Council's Members Seminar focussed on Youth and Education followed by their board meeting. Key highlights of updates on sub groups as follows;

4.8 **Tourism** – further to an understanding from google analytics that 'Argyll and (the) Isles' has a low 'digital' presence, particularly when assessed against comparable destinations e.g. Loch Lomond, Lake District, Western Isles etc.,

a strategic marketing group was formed to secure a fund for a digital marketing initiative. In collaboration with industry and the Council, the Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC) submitted a funding bid to the VisitScotland Growth Fund with a decision due soon.

- 4.9 Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that 2016 was a strong growth year for tourism further supported by 'Wild about Argyll' marketing campaign which was fronted by the famous Scots adventurer Mark Beaumont.
- 4.10 Argyll and Bute continues to benefit from ongoing investment into accommodation by the private sector (Portavadie, Eriskay Hotel, Columba Hotel, Machrie Hotel) and public realm by the Council (Oban), nonetheless, continued investment is required to improve standard of accommodation and activities.
- 4.11 Nicholas Ferguson also facilitated an initial meeting with Kilmartin Museum, Historic Environment Scotland and others to scope the opportunity for Kilmartin Glen as a World Heritage Site.
- 4.12 **Food and Aquaculture;** in the spirit of the recommendations with regarding staying close to decision makers, the Council's Chief Executive wrote to the CEOs of all the major players in Argyll and Bute and whilst the response has been slow, we have seen increased engagement with two of these organisations. HIE already account manage many of these firms and proposed increased joint working with the Council's Chief Executive in this matter. This also supports a desire to expand Argyll's share as the public sector better understands investment proposals and advise accordingly with regards to regulation.
- 4.13 With regards to speeding up the consents process, at the direction of the Scottish Government, there has been a significant review of what some view as a potentially duplicitous and unnecessarily sequential process and a technical report was issued with recommendations to streamline the process. Whilst this does not recommend a 'one size fits all' consenting process as operated in Norway, it also recognises that the high level of regulation in Scotland supports the consensus that Scottish farmed salmon is world leading in quality. The view of the sub group of the economic forum is that the Council as a regulator is playing its part to support industry.
- 4.14 With regards to collaboration with the academic sector, Professor Nick Owens, Director of the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) has agreed to join the forum and we hope to discover future opportunities to be explored.

- 4.15 In collaboration with Calmac, Food from Argyll have opened a 'Food from Argyll' restaurant on the north pier in Oban promoting regional food and drink products and if successful may lead to further outlets being opened.
- 4.16 For **Youth and Education**, the Argyll and Bute 'Developing Young Workforce' group presented their funding bid to the national board early December to secure significant funding to deliver improved vocational education and youth employment. Private sector led, the group is supported by the Council and HIE and have been active in identifying potential private sector companies to join as an active member of the group. The Chair of the group is Jane MacLeod who leads the Youth and Education sub group of the Economic Forum. Nicholas Ferguson and the Chief Executive of the Council formally advised the national board of their support for the bid which was successful.
- 4.17 Oban as a University Town continues to remain a key priority for the Council and HIE and signs promoting this endeavour have been installed on the vehicular approaches to Oban and there has been progress towards securing student accommodation for students of SAMs. Whilst this activity is promising, there is considerable activity required to develop Oban as a genuine University Town which is being pursued by a steering group which is not directly associated with the economic forum.
- 4.18 Regarding barriers, at the request of the Deputy First Minister, HIE have been proactive in seeking to improve mobile phone connectivity in the Highlands and Islands area and a number of applications have been submitted to the Council's Planning Services for mobile communication masts. It should be noted that this is not a devolved matter to the Scottish Parliament and joint lobbying continues to seek improvements to what is a critical barrier to economic growth alongside a national target for 100% broadband connectivity in Scotland.
- 4.19 Nicholas Ferguson also opened the successful Argyll Enterprise Week on the 30 October in Oban where a week of activity to support business growth and networking was delivered by the Council's Business Gateway Team and HIE. The week also witnessed the launch of two funds from the Council; the first is the £500,000 Rural Resettlement Fund to encourage individuals, families and small businesses to relocate to Argyll and Bute and second is the the £1m Business Growth Accelerator Fund being delivered by Business Gateway aimed at providing grants for SMEs not account managed by HIE. The latter is 50% funded by the European Commission. For more significant transformational opportunities, bidders can apply to the Council's £1m Inward Investment Fund which opened for bids earlier the year.

4.20 Nicholas Ferguson’s final words at the opening of Enterprise Week is that on the back of clear growth in key sectors and funded activity to support this, there is a feeling of momentum which needs to be harnessed to meet our overall objectives.

## 5.0 Conclusions

Nicholas Ferguson CBE continues to chair the Economic Forum in a monitoring role of the priority recommendations within this report on which some progress is being made and whilst anecdotal evidence is that key reports are successful, full efforts must continue to achieve our potential with regards to job creation and economic growth to stimulate population growth.

## 6.0 Implications

Strategic Implications	Outcome 1 – economy is diverse and thriving Outcome 2 – Infrastructure that supports sustainable growth Outcome 3 – Education, skills and training maximises opportunities for all.
Consultations, Previous considerations	N/a
Resources	N/a
Prevention	N/a
Equalities	N/a

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