

Management Committee

OLI

Date: 14 February 2018**Agenda Item:** 7 (a) (v)

ACT Hubs update

1.0 Purpose

We have been invited to this meeting as a partner with an active role in promoting tourism through our ACT Hubs project. We are also a delivery partner for SOA Outcome 5 (People live active, healthier, and independent lives). We will briefly introduce our organisation and provide you with an overview of our ACT Hubs project.

2.0 Recommendations

Our membership is a clear way of demonstrating widespread community support and of ensuring that we are progressing projects that reflect area priorities. Members can influence the types of projects we deliver, and we are keen that as many individuals, groups, and businesses as possible in your area sign up for ACT membership, which is currently free. Community support for our projects through planning and delivery is invaluable. More information on membership is available at www.act-now.org.uk or email info@act-now.org.uk.

3.0 Background

Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT) was established in April 2014. We are a registered charity (SCO44733) with a vision to maintain, enhance and promote the coast and countryside of Argyll so that residents and visitors can enjoy it forever. We have a range of objectives to help fulfil this vision. Our objectives are:

- To care for and enhance our environment - working strategically and locally.
- To encourage people to enjoy and benefit from our environment.
- To encourage investment that will improve our environment.
- To share ideas on how to care for, enhance and enjoy our environment.
- To increase opportunities for local people such as employment, training, and volunteering.
- To work in partnership with individuals or groups with an interest in our environment.

We are a small organisation with two permanent staff – a full time development manager and a part time finance officer. Additionally, four project staff and two contractors contribute to the delivery of four projects on a full- or part-time basis. Our Board has a maximum of 12, with four agency representatives and eight community representatives. We are also supported by a team of advisors with expertise in a variety of subjects. Our membership is open to anyone living in Argyll and the Isles. Members are kept up to date with a quarterly newsletter and can be invited to join project steering groups or suggest projects for ACT to deliver.

We have a proven track record of successful project delivery but have reached capacity with our existing staff. We are finalising our Growth Strategy and hoping to secure support from HIE and key agencies to resource a Business Development Officer to identify income options and help us to build a sustainable financial model.

4.0 ACT Projects

Our objectives are delivered through projects which have brought in over £1.5M of funding to Argyll and the Isles since 2014. We work across Argyll and the Isles on a variety of place and people-based projects. Current projects include peatland restoration in Islay (CANN project); eradication of *Rhododendron ponticum* in Glen Creran, Appin (Glen Creran); woodland activities for people with poor mental health across Argyll (Branching Out); employability training and service provision in Helensburgh and Lomond (ACT Argyll); supporting long-distance routes across Argyll to work co-operatively and pool resources for marketing and income generation (LDR forum); and supporting communities to develop projects that will enhance tourism (ACT Hubs).

Our Branching Out project runs innovative programmes of woodland-based activities, in partnership with the NHS and Forestry Commission Scotland, for people with poor mental health. The project helps to tackle chronic problems such as anxiety and depression by getting people back to nature and encouraging peer-support through teamwork in the woods. There are five teams across all four localities of Argyll and Bute, including Oban, delivering 12-week programmes for participants. For more information and to watch a short film about the project see <https://www.act-now.org.uk/en/what-we-do/233-branching-out>.

Our ACT Hubs project is working with communities to help plan projects that will enhance tourism in the local area, encourage people to explore the great outdoors, and benefit the local economy. We are supporting a range of community projects including access, interpretation, habitat improvement and volunteering programmes. ACT Hubs is part-financed by ACT and part-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community Argyll and the Islands LEADER 2014-2020

programme. We have a full-time project officer and part-time finance and marketing officers. ACT Hubs is currently funded until June 2018.

4.1 ACT Hubs community projects

In Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Isles we are working with the Lochgilphead Phoenix Project to support their plans for developing the Corran area in Lochgilphead in to an accessible area with nature trails and wildlife viewing opportunities. The area is owned by the Council, and is infested with the invasive plant, Japanese knotweed. Eradication of Japanese knotweed from the area is an essential foundation to future development. The Phoenix Project are investigating the possibility of obtaining responsibility for the area from the Council. ACT Hubs is commissioning a feasibility study for the eradication of Japanese knotweed. This study will benefit anyone taking responsibility for the area by providing costs and timescales for Japanese knotweed eradication.

We are also working with the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust to support their ideas for attracting visitors to the island for a variety of short- or long-term volunteering roles. ACT Hubs is developing guidance for setting up a volunteer programme.

In Cowal, we are working with the Tighnabruaich District Development Trust and Kilfinan Community Forest, with input from local residents including primary school pupils, to develop a leaflet describing and mapping local walking trails. The aim of the leaflet is to encourage people to spend more time in the area by highlighting the opportunities to explore on foot. ACT Hubs has facilitated meetings with representatives of the local groups and co-hosted a public meeting about the project. ACT Hubs has also supported development of the leaflet content and commissioned the design of a leaflet covering Tighnabruaich and North Kames. The leaflet will be available in print and electronic versions in Spring 2018. The community have also organised path marking and maintenance to encourage more people to explore the area of Tighnabruaich and Kames. A further two leaflets are planned to map paths in and around Portavadie and Kilfinan.

In Helensburgh and Lomond we are working with the Loch Long Jetty Association (LLJA) to develop plans for a floating pontoon and visitor moorings at the Teighness slipway in Arrochar. The pontoon will provide safe pedestrian access to Loch Long. The aims of this project are to provide a facility that will encourage greater use of Loch Long for leisure activities and attract more visitors to Arrochar by boat. The project was initially developed by Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui Community Council but the LLJA has been set up as a registered charity to continue the project. Planning permission has been granted for the pontoon. ACT Hubs is supporting the development of plans for the pontoon, particularly sourcing, and applying for capital funding. ACT Hubs also aims to formulate brief guidance on the process of installing a pontoon for other communities who want to embark on a similar project.

In addition to location specific projects we are supporting ideas that have a strategic approach and cover a wider area across Argyll and the Isles. These projects include a review of visitor giving schemes and how these could be used to generate income for the maintenance of long-distance routes; a guide to developing regional food trails to showcase local produce; and the design of an info-graphic to illustrate tourism infrastructure such as the long-distance route network, transport links and electric vehicle charging points. We are working in partnership with Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative (AITC) on several of these projects.

5.0 Conclusions

Overall, we want to ensure that the coast and countryside that is being promoted as a product for tourism in Argyll and the Isles is managed and maintained in a positive way. We are aware of a general concern for visitor management and the capacity of Argyll to cope with increased visitor numbers. However, we are also inspired by the enthusiasm of communities to enhance their environment for the benefit of residents and visitors. Current and future activities of ACT, particularly through ACT Hubs, aim to support communities and enhance visitor experiences by contributing to improved infrastructure such as access, interpretation, facilities, and habitat management.

Our activities also contribute to our priority activity in Outcome 5 which is to “promote awareness of opportunities and activities to increase use of the outdoor environment”. We want to encourage better health and wellbeing through increased outdoor activity for people of all ages and abilities. We are currently making a short film about the advantages of outdoor activity and how regular activities can be included in daily routines. We believe that people who engage with their environment through outdoor activities will be encouraged to take better care of their surroundings. This will have great benefits for all current and future generations of residents and visitors in Argyll and the Isles.

Our ACT Hubs project is due to end in June 2018. However, plans to extend the project until September 2018 (within the existing budget) and to develop new approaches to build upon the success of ACT Hubs are underway. Community support, demonstrated through membership, is particularly important when developing new projects and applying for funding.

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References

For more information: www.act-now.org.uk

Appendices

N/A