

THE DUNOON PROJECT



The Vision and The Narrative

Our Overarching Objective

To attract visitors, create employment and boost the wider local economy.

Our Vision

By 2030 Dunoon will be a thriving and caring community with high quality employment and training plus business development opportunities linked to its outstanding environment and its renewed appeal to outdoor enthusiasts of all abilities. Dunoon is widely known and valued as a destination of first choice for outdoor adventure on Glasgow's doorstep.

Our Mission

The Dunoon community takes control of its future socioeconomic prosperity, health and wellbeing by owning and managing the Corlarach Forest and entering a 99 year lease with the British Strategic Investment Fund (BSIF), a pension fund investor, who will own and manage the timber resource in exchange for a rental to be used for community regeneration priorities. In addition, BSIF will be granted the right for to develop the Dunoon Project infrastructure through a special purpose vehicle to be delivered within an agreed timeframe.

Our Values

- Community leadership and decision making
- Quality of life and wellbeing
- Quality employment, training and skills development
- Business development
- Environmental quality
- Carbon reduction
- Green travel
- Life choices

Introduction

The Dunoon Regeneration Initiative is a hugely ambitious and imaginative project being progressed by the community of Dunoon, an historic seaside resort on the banks of the Clyde in Scotland. The initiative has been developed within the community specifically to reverse their socio-economic plight as flagged in the Argyll & Bute Economic Forum findings in 2016 where Dunoon was identified as one of four towns deserving particular attention as a result of major decline or stagnation in population.

At this time the community has identified an ambitious project package – The Dunoon Project - based on introducing a gondola to carry people from the sea to the summit of Kilbride Hill behind the town. The early thinking around the Dunoon Project is highlighted in the 2016 Forum report as exactly the type of product and service which will attract paying visitors from the central belt and further afield.

Background and Context

Dunoon dates back to medieval times with its own castle and feuding clans. The town had its heyday initially as a seaside resort spanning from the Victorian era through to the 1980s and then more recently as the base for the American Forces during the Cold War. When the Forces pulled out in the 1990s the town spiralled into decline. Several attempts have been made to regenerate this historic seaside town and whilst having some impact none of these initiatives have been of sufficient scale or had the community at their heart. None of these have focused on the towns unique setting, its proximity to the Glasgow Conurbation, its exceptional environment and outstanding forest hinterland.

The town of Dunoon has a community of c9000 residents with its own high school, college and leisure facilities. It enjoys direct ferry and rail links into the city of Glasgow – giving access within an hour. The Cowal Peninsula is a scenic delight and the town is surrounded by hills and forestry with an intricate network of paths and trails. Nearby Benmore Botanic Garden is where the modern forestry movement was born in Scotland after the war making the most of its unique warm, damp microclimate.

Recently the business community through the Dunoon BID 'Dunoon Presents' has staged various events to pull in visitors and seeking to change people's perceptions of the town. Some of the most successful events have been adventure related – running, cycling, mountain-biking and water sports.

The Need for Investment

What is lacking is new infrastructure and investment in accommodation and public realm to allow these events to grow and to draw visitors back for more prolonged experiences in the town and its hinterland. What is also lacking are quality jobs and business opportunities, and local affordable housing to retain young people and attract economically active people to move to the area. With an ageing population there is also a looming crisis in caring for the elderly within the community and long term unwell.

The Dunoon community wants to tackle these issues and fully recognises it cannot afford to wait for or expect the public sector to take the lead especially in light of unprecedented cutbacks in public sector funding.

The Dunoon Regeneration Initiative

It has been recognised that imagination and ambition is needed to reverse the town's fortunes and in so doing establish it as one of Scotland's best places to live which offers great days out and a must visit outdoor adventure destination on the coast. The aim is to establish Dunoon as destination of first choice appealing to a wide base of outdoor enthusiasts and visitors alike who expect something better - and benchmarked against world class facilities throughout the world.

It is seeking to build on the recent campaign activity championed by the Argyll & The Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC) positioning Argyll as Scotland's Adventure Coast through the Wild About Argyll initiative and the recent Heart & Soul of Scotland campaign celebrating the proximity of Argyll with Glasgow and ease of transport options. Cowal and Bute are ideally placed to optimise this market positioning.

The Dunoon Regeneration Initiative is therefore seeking to capitalise on the town's unique assets to tackle its regeneration head on.

With a steering group of key local businesspeople at the helm, the ambitious ideas hatched in 2015 have now been packaged as an infrastructure project which will create new high quality employment opportunities, develop the area's environmental credentials, improve the wellbeing of locals and drive visitor footfall and spend.

The Dunoon Project

A simple project concept has been developed to sit at the heart of the regeneration initiative. This project is entirely focused on providing access to the town's unique backdrop with a viewpoint and a network of paths and trails for walkers, mountain bikers and cyclists of all abilities. The key point of differentiation is the sea to summit connection. The Dunoon Project will reinvigorate Dunoon's unique location and take the traditional seaside resort concept and recast it in a very contemporary and inclusive way.

The catalyst is the proposal to install a new gondola system which will carry people 2km from the town's waterfront to the summit of Kilbride Hill where an outstanding café and restaurant experience will exploit the panoramic views across the Firth of Clyde and its islands and north to the Arrochar Alps.

The summit will give access to an extensive mountain bike trail network and walking routes and a unique 4km zipwire experience from the vicinity of Bishop's Seat on Kilbride Hill, over the Bishop's Glen and back to the base station is proposed. An alpine coaster is proposed within the woodland and a visitor centre which will interpret the unique environment and the woodland management activity. Future development ideas include clusters of carbon neutral eco pods and specialist holiday accommodation.

Community Leadership

To deliver the Dunoon Project it has been recognised that a new way of working is needed where the collective community sets the vision and pace and private sector partners deliver the outcomes.

The steering group who coined the project idea established a company limited by guarantee – The Dunoon Project Ltd – on 30 April 2019 and secured charitable status in December 2019. They are actively seeking community membership of the company and engagement in the project development.

The Dunoon Project Ltd directors have secured a private sector investor, BSIF, who is empathetic to the community's aspirations and through a detailed feasibility study has devised a Dunoon Project proposal which is both viable and capable of expansion through time. The investor is keen to develop and operate the Dunoon Project on the ground.

A delivery model has been developed which focuses on working directly with BSIF and establishing a Special Purpose Vehicle to deliver the infrastructure and then manage the operation – on the basis that the community becomes a landowner and this land asset facilitates the regeneration.

Community Empowerment

The Community Empowerment Act 2015 has provided an unprecedented opportunity for communities to take control of their future destiny - and in this case at a scale that will place Dunoon on the Scottish map as one of its most ambitious and forward-thinking places to live, work and play.

The Dunoon Project concept fits strongly with the ethos of the new community empowerment legislation and will enable this community to directly deliver public sector priorities around job creation, business development, carbon reduction, woodland restoration, health and wellbeing, green travel and destination development.

The Catalyst - Acquiring Corlarach Forest

The enabler for regenerating Dunoon and the Cowal Peninsula is the community taking ownership of Corlarach, the large forest sitting behind the town and spanning southwards to Toward.

Through ownership of the entire forest, the community will be able to provide the land needed for the infrastructure development and grant the rights to develop it – and simultaneously gain long term rental income from the forest resource to sustain the new charity and help the community take forward agreed community regeneration priorities

within and around the town. Looking to the future they will be able to engage in the future management of the forest and permit further development rights (subject to planning) for activity which will complement the Gondola project and continue to regenerate the town and its hinterland - and in so doing actively secure quality jobs, attract economically active residents, generate a new visitor footfall and provide significant health and wellbeing benefits for residents.

By owning the forest land the community will have both a steady source of income from leasing the land to the private sector and the ability to control the future development opportunity. Accordingly, irrespective of when the Dunoon Project actually commences on the ground it will have an income stream to kick start smaller scale regeneration initiatives and support local charitable causes.

The community also wish to acquire other land assets including Bishops Glen which will ensure the full land holding required for the infrastructure development is within community control.

Making it Happen

The Dunoon Project board have secured local and national political support and a budget from HIE to facilitate the next steps in seeking an asset transfer from the Scottish Ministers through their managers Forestry Land Scotland and engaging the wider community. The community has provided funding from benefactors/loans to progress a 'Social Capital' socio-economic impact assessment for the proposed Gondola project as part of agreeing the 'offer' for the land and trees. They also have limited funds to engage legal professionals to draft heads of terms for the lease and development arrangement with the pension fund investor plus advise on the CATs process.

Engaging the Wider Community

To allow the wider community to fully engage a coordinator has been appointed with HIE funding from within the local community. A programme has been developed for meetings with key stakeholders and regular drop in sessions at the Queens Hall have been planned from 21 January 2020 with a new website being launched from that point. Meetings are being scheduled with local groups and organisations with a programme of engagement with the schools and college.

This is a new approach to community development in Dunoon where ownership of the Corlarach Forest enables the relationship required to allow the Dunoon Project to take place. The community has got the vision but does not have the wherewithal to deliver for itself at this scale - by securing the land and forestry asset it can develop a robust relationship with BSIF who will acquire the trees to be managed within the fund and create a special purpose vehicle to develop and operate the infrastructure on their behalf.

Ideas into Action

The key enablers are

- Establishing a community based charitable organisation to lead the regeneration of Dunoon (DONE)
- Community engagement (UNDERWAY)

- Establishing a shared vision for regenerating the town and hinterland (UNDERWAY)
- Asset transfer from FLS (UNDERWAY)
- Lease heads of terms with investor/developer (UNDERWAY)
- Regulatory consents (EARLY DISCUSSIONS UNDERWAY PENDING ASSET TRANSFER)
- Community fund raising plan for land acquisition (£1m from Scottish Land Fund)
- Community regeneration investment plan for rental income

Have your say - now

This initiative is innovative, ambitious, imaginative and doable. It is completely within the grasp of the community but for it to happen the community needs to demonstrate this is the future they want. Naysayers need to voice concerns as early as possible and help the project team address these.

People in support need to say exactly that at every opportunity. And anyone who is disinterested should ensure they don't stand in the way of those who do want to secure this future for their community.

Inevitably some people will struggle with the idea of change and worry that visitors are being put before locals. This requires a new mindset – more visitors will boost the local economy, and if the community are driving what happens this will be done in such a way it enhances local quality of life and doesn't threaten it.

Please visit www.dunoonproject.org.uk for up to date information on the project and some very useful Questions and Answers.

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