

HI~Arts: development project for Argyll & Bute

HI~Arts (Highlands & Islands Arts Ltd) has been working with Argyll and Bute Council and Argyll and the Islands Enterprise since the original Argyll Arts Audit in 1994. More recently we have been in discussion with both these bodies to explore a development initiative for Argyll & Bute, bearing in mind the potential legacy of Scotland's Year of Highland Culture and the recommendations pending within the Culture Bill.

Our intention is to undertake a research programme with a view to developing the following:

- An internet resource for the Arts in Argyll & Bute, with online resources, an events listing and news editorial;
- Suitable project branding and marketing;
- A representative members Forum or advocacy group;
- A viable business plan for the sustained growth of the project beyond the pilot phase.

In February 2007, the HI~Arts web site acquired 1,567,641 unique visitors with over 77,000 visits to Events Details. A new Argyll-specific site would naturally receive significant traffic from HI~Arts, in addition to new visitors from stand alone promotion of an Argyll site. Between 1 January and 31 October 2006, 549 separate events from the Argyll and Bute area were included in our online Events Guide. We would expect to be able to increase that number by 50%.

It is important to stress that the results of our work will be directed by the specific needs and wishes of the arts community. Therefore the objectives listed above are, at present, subject to discussion rather than guaranteed outcomes. However, we are keen to inform the Community Planning Partnership of the project, particularly as both Argyll & Bute Council and HIE Argyll & The Islands have worked with us in getting consultation under way.

We have begun some preliminary discussions with arts organisations and festivals, working from a contact list developed between HI~Arts and Argyll & Bute Council Arts Development Officer Eileen Rae. Resources will be unlikely to permit direct consultation with individual artists but we will be looking at how to develop a mechanism of locally based representation if a Forum is established.

While we wholeheartedly support the individuality of arts and cultural organisations, including events and festivals, there could be a case for exploring collaborative marketing, looking to Argyll's rich but in many ways under exploited cultural heritage.

HI~Arts is a Foundation Client of the SAC and jointly core funded by Highlands & Islands Enterprise. At the present time, Argyll & Bute Council has kindly agreed funding towards expenses likely to be incurred for research and development. HI~Arts will be contributing staff time and initial web site costs from its own resources.

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