Topic Paper 14: Economy, Culture, Creativity and Community Wealth Building

Information required by the Act regarding the issue addressed in this section:

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)

Section 15(5)(a): • the principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district.

Section 15(5)(b): • the principal purposes for which the land is used.

Section 15(5)(ch): • the desirability of maintaining an appropriate number and range of cultural venues and facilities (including but not limited to, live music venues) in the district

NPF Policy 25: Community wealth building:

LDPs should be aligned with any strategy for community wealth building for the area. Spatial strategies should address community wealth building priorities; identify community assets; set out opportunities to tackle economic disadvantage and inequality; and seek to provide benefits for local communities.

NPF Policy 26: Business and industry:

LDP's should encourage, promote and facilitate business and industry uses and enable alternative ways of working. NPF4 states LDPs should allocate sufficient land for business and industry, taking into account business and industry land audits, in particular ensuring that there is a suitable range of sites that meet current market demand, location, size and quality in terms of accessibility and services. This allocation should take account of local economic strategies and support broader objectives of delivering a low carbon and net zero economic recovery, and a fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

NPF Policy 31: Culture and creativity:

LDPs should recognise and support opportunities for jobs and investment in the creative sector, culture, heritage and the arts.

Links to Evidence:

National

- Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2023)
- Scottish Government - Policy Statement for the Creative Industries (2019)
- Scottish Government - Community Ownership in Scotland 2022
- Scottish Government – Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic: Report (2023)

Regional

- Regional Transformational Opportunities in the Highlands and Islands (2025)
- Regional Skills Assessments – Highlands and Islands (2025)
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise Property Strategy 2021-2026

Local

- Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) (2024)
- Argyll and Bute Council – Industry and Business Land Audit (2025)
- Argyll and Bute Council Economic Strategy Refresh 2024-2034
- Argyll and Bute Council Economic Strategy Action Plan, 2025-2028
- Argyll and Bute Council Woodland and Forestry Strategy (2011)
- Dunoon BID 2023-2028
- Isle of Bute BID
- BID4Oban
- Community Wealth Building in Argyll and Bute: A Framework for Action
- Argyll and Bute Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2024-2034

- Argyll and Bute Council Economic Briefing – March 2025 (internal document)
- Rural Growth Deal
- Community Regeneration Partnership Funding
- Argyll and Bute Gaelic Language Plan 2022-2026

Datasets

- Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- Scottish Government – Businesses in Scotland (2024)
- Data and the Census – Argyll and Bute Council (2024)
- Skills Development Scotland – Data Matrix
- Scottish Household Survey (2023)
- Scottish Census (2022)
- Argyll and Bute Business Gateway – Key Stats (2025)
- Argyll and Bute STEAM data (2024) (Internal database held by Argyll and Bute Council Economic Development team)
- Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)
- NOMIS – Labour Market Profile
- Argyll and Bute Council - Land and Property Assets Map

Summary of Evidence

Introduction

This topic paper contains evidence on the economy of Argyll and Bute, covering business and industry and the wider economy, setting out the relevant issues and emerging trends. The topic paper provides an overview of key economic figures that are of relevance within Argyll and Bute, before looking at the national and local economic strategies which help promote prosperity and growth across the region. The topic paper also covers evidence of culture, creativity including creative industries, community Wealth Building (CWB) within the region.

Information relating directly to town centres and retail has been included separately under topic paper 15: Town Centres and Retail. Similarly, information on tourism and the rural economy is included in topic paper 19: Rural Development and Tourism.

Argyll and Bute's Economic Profile – Key characteristics

This section of the topic paper covers some key facts and figures relating to the economic indicators which make up the region.

On national economic indicators, Argyll and Bute tends to perform similarly to the Scottish average, although it is recognised that the region underperforms in some key economic areas. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Scottish Government provide high-level statistics which act as indicators of overall economic importance, not only nationally, but at Local Authority level too.

Note: The statistics below relate to the entire area covered by Argyll and Bute, including areas within Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park planning authority area.

Workforce

In 2026 Argyll and Bute had an approximate population of 88,000 which has gradually declined since census records began in 1991 and current national projections from the National Records of Scotland (NRS), which predict a fall to 84,247 by 2047. This pattern mirrors wider demographic trends across many rural Scottish local authorities, several of which, such as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Dumfries and Galloway, are also experiencing sustained depopulation, while urban areas in the central belt continue to grow. These trends are reflected in the NRS 2023 and 2024 mid-year population estimates, and NRS sub-national projections suggest that Argyll and Bute's population will decline by a further 0.82% between mid-2022 and mid-2032.

Notwithstanding the above statistics, between 2019-2024, the population increased by 0.4% across the local authority area. Although NRS does not attribute this explicitly to COVID-19 in headline summaries, migration data for 2021 shows a sharp rise. Council analysis confirms that 2021 saw a "jump in inward migration", challenging earlier projections that assumed low or zero migration. Much of the in-migration population are individuals aged 50-69, while there is a sustained out-migration of those aged 15-24. This pattern continues to contribute to the increasing, ageing population. [argyll-bute.gov.uk].

This aligns with Scotland-wide patterns during the pandemic:

- People moved from cities to rural/coastal areas for space, remote working, and lifestyle reasons.
- Argyll and Bute's coastal and island environments made it especially attractive.

Employment Rate

The Employment Rate looks at the proportion of the population aged between 16-65 that are in paid work either as employees or self-employed. According to NOMIS statistics from October 2024 to September 2025), Argyll and Bute had an employment rate of 73.3%, just over 1% lower than the Scottish average which sits at 74.4%.

Unemployment Rate

Argyll and Bute’s unemployment rate sits at 3.2% which is marginally lower than the Scottish average at 3.5%. This figure has been decreasing since records began in 2004, with the figure falling by 1.1% over that period.

Claimant Count

The Claimant Count measures the number of people who are claiming unemployment related benefits. Figures from February 2026 show that 2.7% of the population are claiming unemployment related benefits. This figure is lower than the figure for the same time period in 2023 (2.9%) and is also lower than the Scottish figure for the same time period (3.1%).

Economic Inactivity

People are classed as economically inactive if they are not in employment but do not meet the criteria for being “unemployed”. This means they have not been seeking work within the previous four weeks or were unable to start within the next two weeks. This figure includes those that may be retired, looking after family at home, or being long-term sick and disabled.

31,034 persons within the local authority area are considered economically inactive, which includes retired residents, students, those who support home living or family, and those that are long-term sick or disabled.

Between October 2024 and September 2025 NOMIS reports that 12,100 (24.5%) of Argyll and Bute’s 16–64 year old population were considered economically inactive. This figure has seen a 2.6% rise from October 2023 and September 2024, where 10,800 people, around 21.9%, were considered economically inactive.

The figure for Argyll and Bute is higher than the national average which stands at 22.7% of the population within the age bracket of 16-64 in the same time period.

It is important to note that Argyll and Bute has a higher median population age at 51 than the Scottish average at 42(ONS, 2024). This is likely to affect the working population and relates to trends of an increasing ageing population in the region. The retired population accounts for more than two thirds of this figure (71.2%), which correlates with Argyll and Bute's ageing population trends. Figure 1, from the NRS, breaks down the number of residents in Argyll and Bute by age groups.

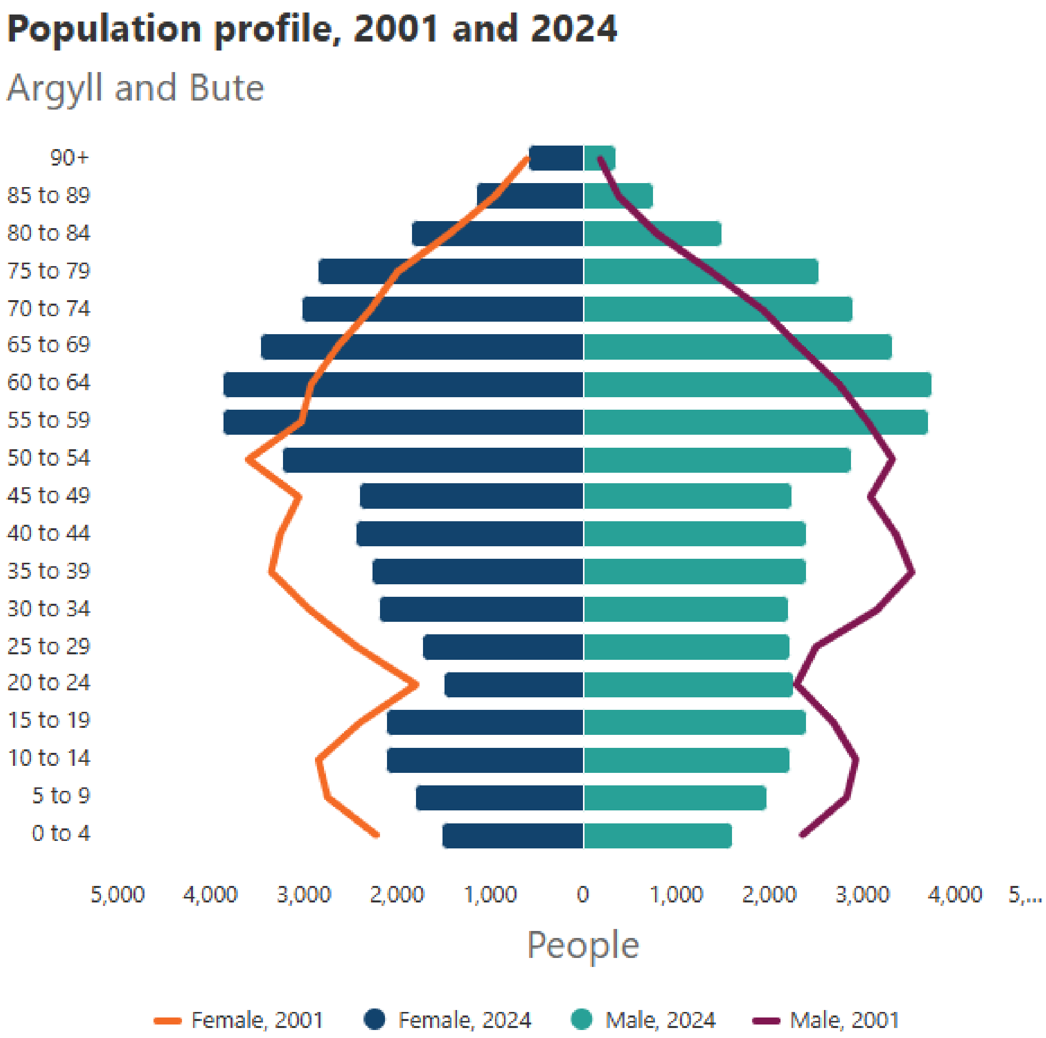

Figure 1: Population profile of Argyll and Bute by age group (2001 and 2024)

Child Poverty

The figures for children in relative poverty remains slightly lower than the Scottish average. The No One Left Behind toolkit published by the Improvement Service for 2025 notes that 21.2% of children live in poverty in Argyll and Bute, compared to 23.3% for Scotland. This figure has risen by 2.3% from 18.9% in 2020/21. It remains a lower rise than the National figure, which has seen a rise of 2.5% within the same time period.

Economic Productivity

Argyll and Bute performs similarly to the national average when it comes to productivity. Like many rural local authorities, Argyll and Bute performs well in the tourism and rural industries. Almost half (46.9%) of the workforce in Argyll and Bute work in the Standard Occupational Classification (SoC) 2020 Major Group 1-3, which includes managers, professionals and associate professional occupations. The largest employment sector in the area is public administration and defence, with 11.4% of the working population working within this sector.

Gross Value Added

The Data Matrix published by Skills Development Scotland provides Gross Value Added (GVA) figures per job and per industry. GVA is an economic productivity metric that measures the value generated by any unit engaged in the production of goods and services.

Argyll and Bute's GVA per job is estimated at £50,300 for 2025, lower than the national figure at £57,700. Of all employment sectors, public administration and defence account for the highest GVA per industry at 21.7% of the total figure. A full breakdown of the GVA by industry can be found here.

Travel to work patterns

The Scottish Household Survey (2023) provides evidence on the commuting and working patterns of residents in Argyll and Bute. The statistics show that the majority of employed adults in Argyll and Bute do not work from home (70%). The sample size of the data is relatively low, though the Scottish Census (2022) results show that around 33% of the workforce in the planning authority area work from home, largely in line with the statistics from the household survey.

Further information on work travel patterns is highlighted in Topic Paper 07 – Transport.

Business in Argyll and Bute

The Scottish Government published information on the number of businesses operating in 2024 in Scotland. The statistics published show Argyll and Bute having 4,100 active businesses, employing 27,020 people, turning over approximately £3.2 billion.

Most of the businesses identified are small to medium size, hiring between 0-49 employees. These businesses account for around 98.3% (3,845) of all businesses in Argyll and Bute. A breakdown of the type of businesses can be found in figure 2. This is broken down further in figure 3 which details the number of businesses by industry across the region. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing is the largest industry in Argyll and Bute, due to the rural nature of the area, though construction and tourism are key economic sectors too. Overall, Argyll and Bute has approximately one business per 543 residents.

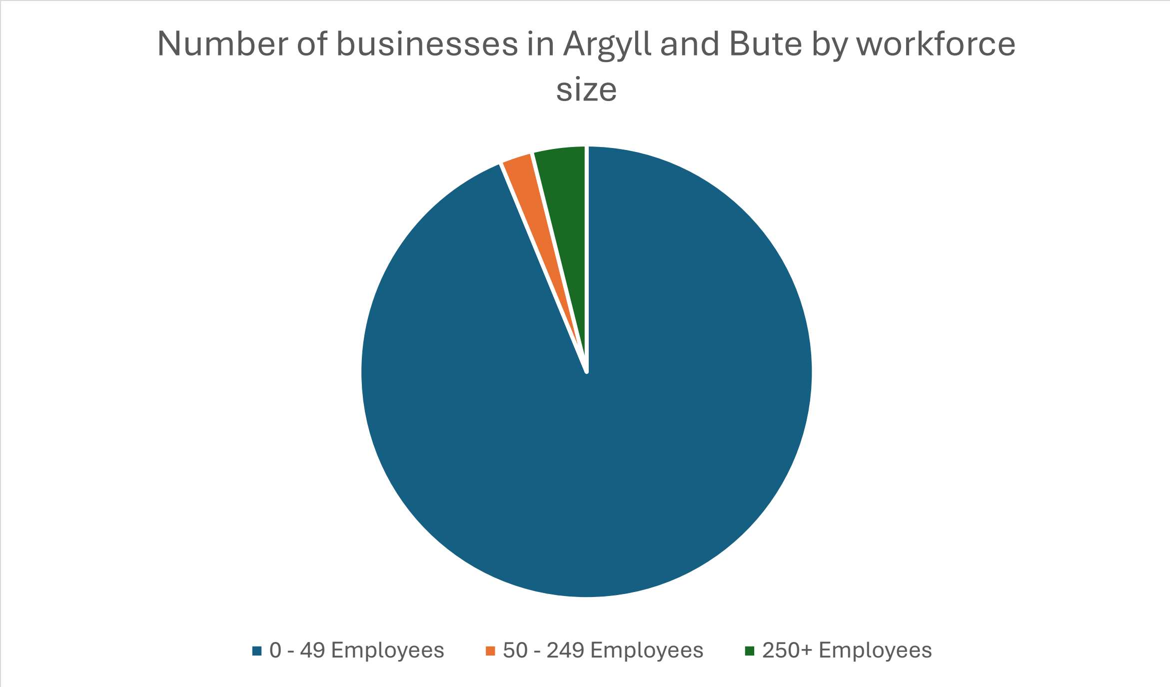

Figure 2: Number of businesses in Argyll and Bute by workforce size

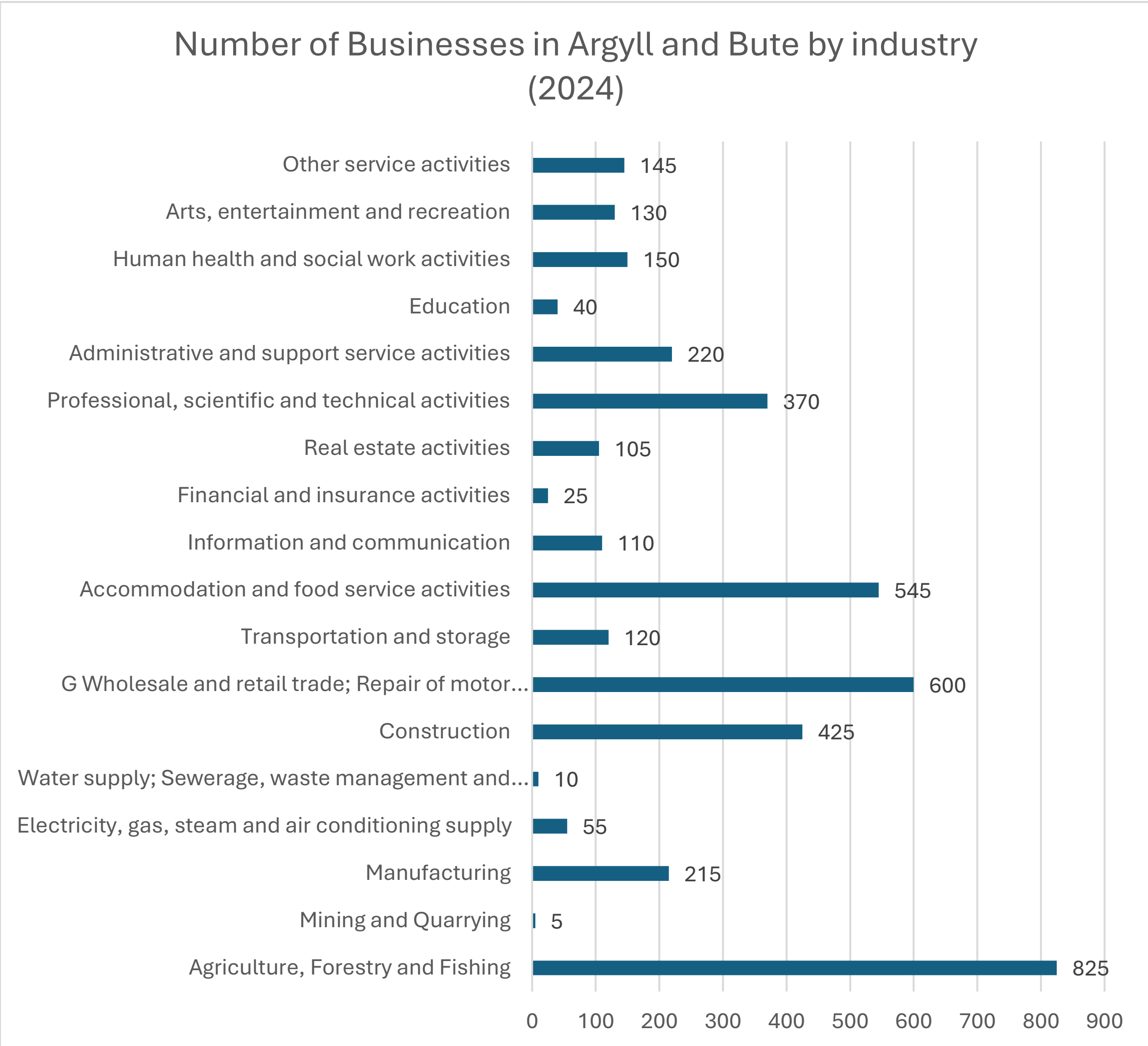

Figure 3: Number of businesses in Argyll and Bute by industry

Despite the numbers, the larger businesses (over 250 employees) contribute to the largest turnover in the local authority area, contributing to £1.39 billion, accounting for around 56% of the total turnover. Key sectors within Argyll and Bute include agricultural and rural industries, though the tourism sector plays a vital role in contributing towards employment, with a large percentage of established businesses operating in the retail and accommodation sectors.

Figure 4 shows the change in the number of businesses over a 10-year period. The figure has remained relatively stable, with no significant change year-to-year. 4100 private sector businesses were registered in 2024, 25 less than the previous year.

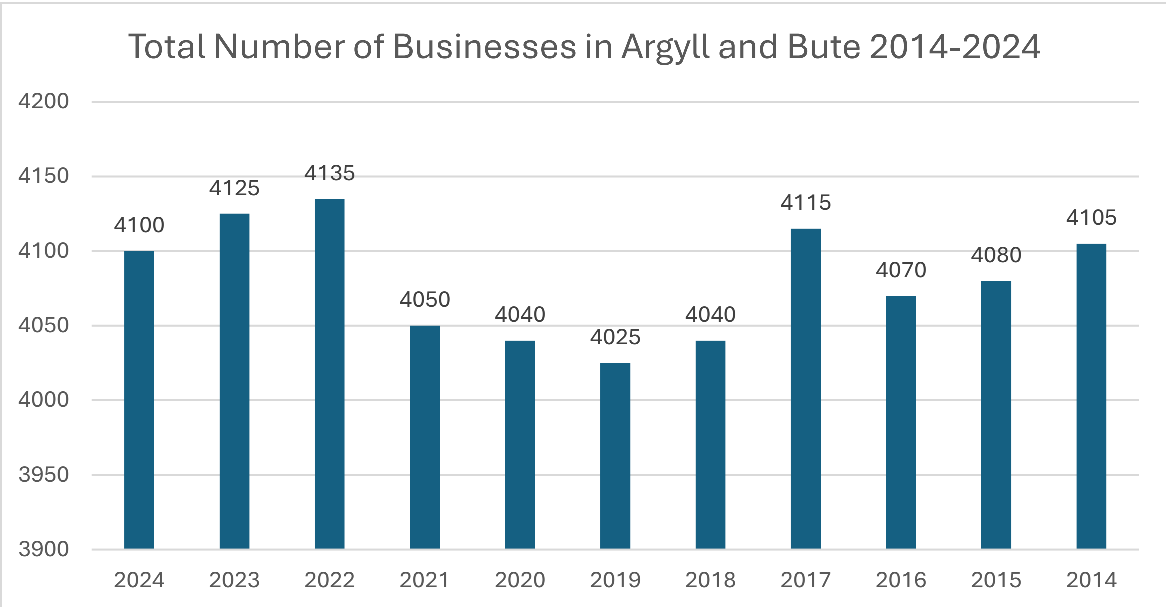

Figure 4: Total number of businesses in Argyll and Bute 2014-2024

National Context

Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation

In 2023, the Scottish Government published [Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation] which sets out a vision on how to grow the national economy over a 10-

year period. The plan sets out the vision to create a wellbeing economy that is thriving across economic, social and environmental dimensions and aims to deliver a fairer, wealthier and greener economy. The strategy focuses on economic priorities to deliver the ambitions and vision, which focus on delivery and collaboration to deliver results.

Regional Context

Regional Transformational Opportunities in the Highlands and Islands (2025)

Eskogen was commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) on behalf of the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP) to undertake research to better understand economic opportunities available in the Highlands and Islands. The report focuses on opportunities with the greatest potential to bring transformational change to the region, known in the report as Regional Transformational Opportunities (RTO's).

The report considers that there are 251 potential projects considered as RTO's, with an investment value of just over £100bn. The projects have the potential to deliver a Gross Value-Added (GVA) figure of £76.7bn. Energy opportunities account for the largest percentage of RTO's, at around 40%.

The report notes that Argyll and Bute has the potential to encourage £14.6bn of investment between 2025-2040. This accounts for around 15% of the economic potential in the region, with key opportunities concentrated in the renewable energy and marine sectors, making it a key location in the nations net-zero transition. This includes key onshore wind development and pumped-hydro storage in Mid-Argyll, Kintyre, Oban and Lorn.

In order to realise the economic potential of the region, and in particular Argyll and Bute, development is required to enable the economic potential that are set out in the report. The report looks at 'enablers', specifically:

- *Transport* – Upgrades to A83 (Rest and Be Thankful) and A85 to Oban are essential

- *Housing* – Regional demand for circa 11k-15k across HIREP area, approximately 6-7% of the total figure relating to need and demand specifically in Argyll and Bute
- *Skilled Workforce* – shortage of workers in construction and engineering sectors in the region. There is a need for further training and apprenticeships in the region
- *Ports* – Modernisation and expansion of ports is critical to support energy projects, especially in delivering offshore projects
- *Digital Connectivity* - The region must deliver high-quality broadband and mobile coverage which is critical for business and workforce attraction.

The study identifies the need for place-based approach planning for housing and infrastructure, working collaboratively across the region with public and private partners and developing a local workforce to maximise regional benefit.

<u>Regional Skills Assessment – Highlands and Islands (2025)</u>

Regional Skills Assessments (RSAs) were first launched in 2014 and provide a robust and consistent evidence base to support strategic skills investment planning. Argyll and Bute is represented in the RSA for Highlands & Islands, covering Na h-Eileanan Star, Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands local authorities.

The Regional Skills Assessment (RSA) looks at a number of economic indicators, similar to that of the ONS and Scottish Government in the first section of the topic paper, though it has a particular focus on the workforce in the region. Key figures from the document that show workforce trends in the region are:

- Projected increased workforce in the region to 72,300 from 2025-2035
- Largest industries in the region by GVA include real estate activities, public administration and manufacturing
- GVA annual growth of 1.5% between 2025-2028, slightly under the Scottish average
- Out of 24,100 job postings in the region in the first half of 2025, 34% were for green jobs.

Full details on the RSA can be found here.

Local Context

Argyll and Bute Industry and Business Land Audit (2025)

Argyll and Bute Council conducted an Industry and Business land audit in 2025. This is the first formal audit completed under the adoption of LDP2. Previously, figures were submitted to the Scottish Government under the Planning Performance Framework (PPF), though no formal report was published. The planning authority aims to publish a yearly audit reviewing the uptake of allocated industry and business land, as well as tracking windfall figures per year. As mentioned, this is the first published audit and review of planning history on each of the allocated employment sites, as well as providing updates on mixed-use sites with a potential business allocation.

The 2025 audit identified 17 sites, with a net established supply of 66.73ha. The net figure includes all development on each site to date, including those used for infrastructure. If no work has begun, no figure has been taken off each of the site, though it can be assumed that an approximate 20% per site will be removed to account for infrastructure needs on the sites, giving a more accurate representation of the land available. A breakdown of this is shown within figure 5, with figure 6 showing a breakdown of the total supply by administrative/housing market areas.

Number of Allocated Sites	Gross Established Supply (hectares)	Net Established Supply (hectares)	Change (hectares)
17	71.48	66.73	4.56

Figure 5: Total supply of allocated business and industry sites in LDP2 (hectares)

Administrative Area	Number of Sites	Gross Established Supply (hectares)	Net Established Supply (hectares)	Change (hectares)
BAC	2	14.55	12.57	1.98
HAL	1	3.83	3.83	0
MAKI	7	24.38	24.37	0.01
OLI	7	28.72	25.96	2.66
Total	17	71.48	66.73	4.74

Figure 6: Total supply of allocated business and industry sites in LDP2 by administrative areas (hectares)

The audit looks at the development potential and scope of deliverability of each site within the LDP2 lifespan (5 years). Each industry and business allocation was categorised into:

Immediately Available: Sites that are serviced (fully or partially) and have no constraints that would prevent the site being developed immediately.

Marketable (with constraints): Sites which can be (fully/partially or not serviced) but have minor constraints which prevent immediate development OR the site has no constraints but is not serviced.

Constrained: Land that has no extant planning permission, is partially or not serviced, and has a major constraint that is unlikely to be developed within 5 years.

A breakdown of these sites by market type can be found below in figure 7. The majority of allocated LDP2 business and industry sites are classed as marketable with minor constraints that can be overcome within a five-year timescale.

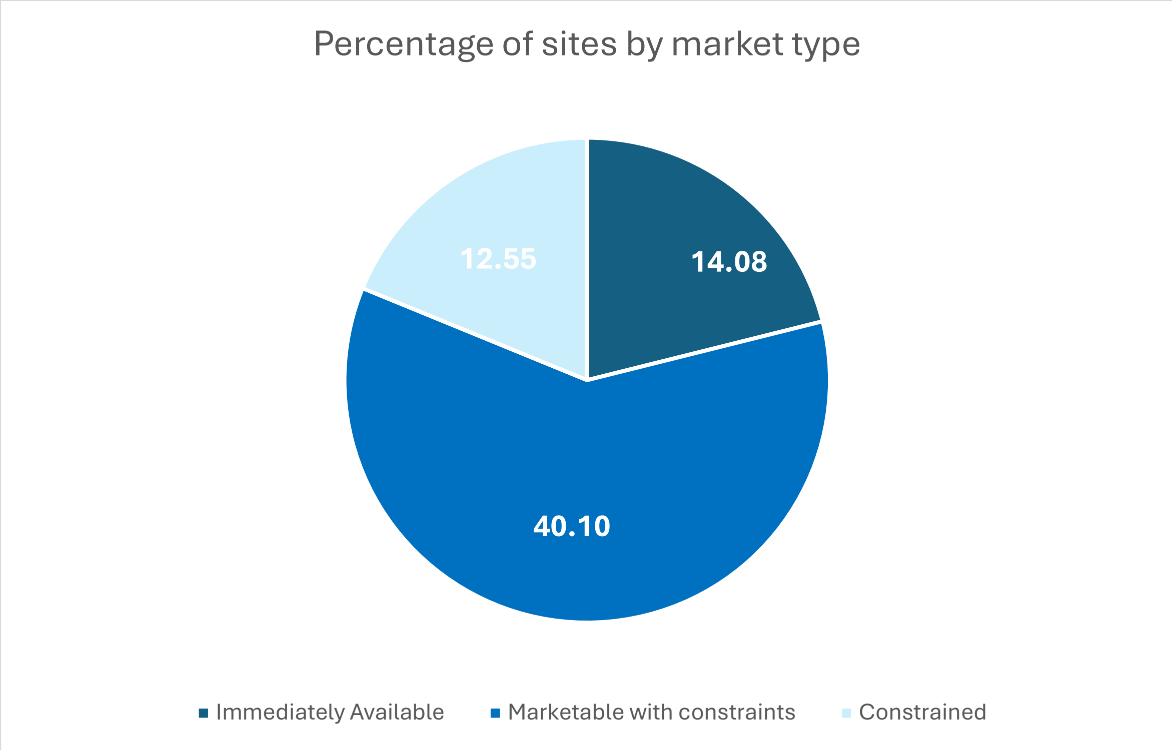

Figure 7: Percentage of sites by market type (hectares)

A large proportion of business and industry development has not been counted for due to the development only being available for a single user. The rationale behind this decision is to monitor new business and employment development where the use of the land has changed. Therefore, many projects in Argyll and Bute that relate to key industries have not been recorded in the audit. This includes developments in sectors such as marine, fish farming, and food and drink industries. Any extension to existing enterprises on land that they operate on, own, or in the case of marine and aquaculture industries, situated primarily in or on water have not been included in the statistics.

Though these developments have not been included in the audit, the planning authority recognises the importance of these industries and will seek to support investment in these key sectors through LDP3. The audit follows a similar format to others completed by Scottish Local Authorities.

The Industry and Business Land Audit does not consider potential future demand, though it is anticipated that this may be covered in future audits. Considering the build out rate of windfall and allocated sites, the land available is deemed sufficient to cover immediate demand (5 years).

Further mapping, including site analysis and aerial mapping for each of the sites can be found in the Business and Industry Land Audit.

Argyll and Bute Council Economic Strategy

Argyll and Bute Council has published an area wide economic strategy covering a 10-year period between 2024-2034. Its strategic vision aims to create a place-based economy and people-centred economy that delivers shared prosperity and sustainable business growth through innovation and collaboration.

The aim is to make economic growth more resilient to external factors such as advances in digital technology and the increasing impact of climate change.

The strategy covers four strategic key pillars:

- PEOPLE: Addressing the continuing decline in our economically active population, improving workforce skills and attracting key workers, promoting equal access to education opportunity, and supporting job opportunities in emerging and new industries.
- PLACE: Investing in our towns, rural and remote rural communities, including our islands and peninsulas, to attract new people and businesses, pursuing external funding opportunities, investing in critical economic infrastructure such as housing, land for business development, reuse of land and buildings for community benefit, digital connectivity and transport (principally roads, ports and ferries).
- PLANET: Delivering net zero and improving our biodiversity by supporting the sustainable growth of clean energy production (i.e. hydro, solar, wind and biomass), woodland, peat and marine habitat restoration, encouraging green industries to develop in our area, nature-based solutions and community ownership.

- PROSPERITY: Creating higher wage opportunities, seizing opportunities in the net-zero economy, improving productivity and innovation through increasing business efficiency including the use of digital technology, empowering communities through ownership and wealth creation, sustaining public services, promoting the blue and green economies, enabling the sustainable growth of key sectors such as food and drink together with revitalising the tourism and hospitality sectors and supporting the growth of the creative industries .

The strategy aims to create new opportunities in the area, develop skills, diversify sectors and support existing businesses.

Though each theme has its own opportunities and challenges, the economic strategy outlines a set of common, cross-cutting themes. These are:

- Achieving a wellbeing economy
- Partnership and collaborative working
- Public sector sustainability
- Maximising external funding opportunities
- Economic intelligence and data gathering
- Governance and accountability
- Monitoring progress

One key outcome of the strategy is to increase the flow and spread of wealth and opportunity around the region, benefiting the people who live and work in the area through improving our physical places and access to economic opportunity. This includes supporting community ownership, reducing inequalities, tackling poverty through providing higher value, well-paid, employment opportunities and supporting employers to take forward the Fair Work First principles.

An Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy Action Plan, currently, 2025-2028, is reviewed on annual basis (ongoing working document) that contains actions that are SMART

(Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) and delivers opportunities, through strong partnership working, that drive economic growth and a fair and inclusive wellbeing economy across the four strategic pillars: people, place, planet and prosperity

Business Needs and Demands

Argyll and Bute Council has not conducted a market study to determine business and industry needs in the region. However, through discussions with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Council's internal Economic Development team, businesses and industries are looking for sites with direct access to water due to both land and marine based needs. This includes industries in key sectors in Argyll, primarily the food and drink sector, from distilling and aquaculture businesses. Argyll and Bute recognises the importance of promoting inclusive, economic growth in the area, but also understands the importance that undeveloped coast plays in protecting the region from further flood risk and climate change. Therefore, development would generally only be supported in areas of developed coast, which is considered coastline within the LDP2 settlement boundary. HIE provided comments through the initial engagement period highlighting that the Regional Strategy, and £14.6bn investment will require land to be allocated that has coastal access as a critical enabler of regional investment.

To measure market demand, Argyll and Bute Business Gateway publish key statistics relating to businesses within a selected reporting period. The most recent information published shows that between April-December 2025, 102 startups have been created in Argyll and Bute, beating the target set of 100 and an increase in the last year to date (LYTD) where the figure was 80. This has 134 full time employees, an increase on 92 from the LYTD.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has a number of sites available for sale and rent. Their Property Strategy indicates that 6 industrial sites are available with an overall gross area of 19,335sqm, with a further 14 business sites totalling 2,727sqm available. HIE states that there is a 48% vacancy rate in the business portfolio (2021), indicating either an oversupply of units in the current market, or a lack of suitable locations and premises for interested businesses.

The lack of take-up on allocated business and industry sites, as referenced in the Industry and Business audit, may suggest that medium to large scale sites are not in high demand. Much of the development is of small scale, or plots within a wider site. Therefore, LDP3 could potentially look at the available, allocated business land stock to establish if the sites are developable within the next plan period and fit the demand and needs of businesses seeking to set up or expand in Argyll and Bute. LDP3 should also identify land with the potential to support small scale industry and business growth, through the allocation of smaller sites for flexible units, or encouraging the reuse of existing buildings.

Inequality

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a relative measure of inequality across approximately 7,000 small areas, called data zones. It is a national approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation, and the tool is regularly used to inform the delivery of policy decision making. SIMD data covers seven categories: income, employment, health, education, housing, geographic access and crime. It should be noted that in rural areas, deprivation levels may be higher due to the natural constraints which restrict geographical access, as well as lower incomes than urban areas. Typically, rural areas often have lower crime rates relative to urban populations which positively effects the overall figure.

The most recent SIMD data was published in 2020, and it provides information on the locations of inequality and deprivation across Scotland. Out of the 125 data zones located in Argyll and Bute, two are categorised as the top 5% most deprived areas in Scotland. These are:

- Figure 8: Helensburgh East (S01007399

- Figure 9: Dunoon (S01007366)

Based on an overall, area-wide assessment, Argyll and Bute is trending as having relatively low deprivation levels compared with other council areas in the country. The pockets of higher deprivation tend to be in the main towns, as evidenced in the SIMD mapping. As of 2020, 19.1% of Argyll and Bute's population live in areas classed as more deprived (deciles 1 to 3). The majority of the population live in deciles 5 to 7, influenced largely by geographical access constrains which affect much of the planning authority population, due to dispersed settlement patterns.

Argyll and Bute Council Woodland and Forestry Strategy (2011)

Argyll and Bute's area has approximately 30% forestry coverage across the whole area. This accounts for around 15% of Scotland's total woodland resource. The Planning Authority last carried out a forestry strategy in 2011 in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland.

Forestry makes a significant contribution to Argyll and Bute's economy, particularly in rural and remote rural areas through woodland and forest management, haulage and small-scale processing. It is estimated that around 1,300 jobs are directly associated with woodlands, with a further 2,250 equivalent jobs in woodland related tourism. Most of the trees grown for sawn timber, pulp, particle board and pallets are processed outside Argyll and Bute, reflecting the difficult and diverse geography in the region, and the greater economic demand for larger processing facilities nearer main, and larger, markets. The forestry strategy identifies the need to develop local and niche markets and facilities to help deliver wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

The strategy identifies strategic priorities in relation to business development, to support the growth of the industry in Argyll and Bute:

- Work with timber producers and local businesses to add and retain value to the timber product within Argyll and Bute.
- Work with land managers to expand woodland cover in agricultural areas where appropriate, thereby contributing to diversification of the rural economy.
- Further develop woodlands' contribution to tourism and recreation in Argyll and Bute. Development of a skilled workforce in Argyll and Bute, geared to future forest management and processing requirements, but also reflecting the development of biomass sector and specialist niche activities.

- Continue to support the development of local timber and biomass markets and supply chains through positive planning measures, encouraging the specification of locally sourced materials and wood fuel.
- Support and promote the development and use of technologies that can add value to Argyll and Bute's economy and contribute to development objectives.

The Forestry Strategy is fifteen years old and would benefit from a refresh, however, much of the paper remains consistent and relevant to the sector today which remains a key economic sector in Argyll and Bute Council. It is the intention of the planning authority to publish an updated and revised strategy before the adoption of Local Development Plan 3, as it has committed to doing so in the current LDP2.

Strategic Economic Investment Locations

Local Development Plan 2 identified Strategic Economic Investment Locations (SEILs), which are our better quality, accessible locations for economic investment. SEIL's have been identified in sustainable locations in; Sandbank, Faslane, Lochgilphead, Machrihanish, Barcaldine and Dunbeg.

The SEILs have been selected because they are the key locations to promote the priority sectors and Highland and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise locational priorities. Therefore, these are safeguarded to restrict the impact of potentially inappropriate uses occurring in these areas.

The locations of the SEIL's can be found in LDP proposal maps, which are found on the Local Development Plan 2 webpage.

Established Industry and Business Areas

Local Development Plan 2 identified 58 Established Business and Industry Areas (EBIAs). EBIAs safeguard employment uses (Class 4, 5 and 6) in areas where there are existing clusters of these uses. LDP2 does allow for some flexibility on the uses within the sites to accommodate changing economic circumstances and allow for emerging economic opportunities.

There are 58 EBIA sites which account for 209.8 hectares of safeguarded business and employment use in Argyll and Bute. This can be broken down further by administrative area as shown in figure 10.

Administrative Area	Number of EBIAs	Total area (hectares)
BAC	8	20.61
HAL	7	39.32
MAKI	26	89.43
OLI	17	60.44
Total	58	209.80

Figure 10: Breakdown of EBIA’s by administrative area (hectares)

The Council will undertake a review of the EBIAs to ensure that each allocation continues to safeguard employment uses within the areas. Further analysis will also be carried out to ascertain the occupancy rate, range of uses and demand for units in each EBIA.

Tourism and Visitor sector

Argyll and Bute’s cultural assets, outstanding landscape and unique heritage make tourism an important and vital sector to our rural economy. Whilst visitors put enormous pressure on key services, transport routes and housing options, the generated income plays an important role in the region. The Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) data shows an increase in all visitor types from 2.2m in 2013 to 3.3m in 2024, indicating the continued growth of the industry in Argyll and Bute.

Visit Scotland’s research and insight into Argyll and the Isles provides a high-level overview of the tourism figures in the area. There were 490,000 overnight visitors by both internal and domestic visitors between 2022-2024, contributing to 2.03 million nights spent in accommodation by visitors in the same time period. Visitors were predominantly domestic, accounting for 1.48 million of the figure above. International tourism contributed to 547,000 overnight stays, with a total visitor spend of 45 million.

This led to overnight visitors spending an average of £336 in the local economy, per trip, in the period of 2022 – 2024. In total, spending reached approximately £165 million in the region, highlighting the importance of the sector within Argyll and Bute.

The Council procures statistics through STEAM – a modelling process which approaches the measurement of tourism from the bottom up, through use of locally supply-side data and tourism performance and visitor survey collection data. The model allows for a comparison between recent years, allowing the Council to identify trends in the sector, from an increase in visitor numbers, to breakdowns on the distribution of economic impact. The most recent data held by the Council relates to 2024 figures.

The key headlines show that the number of visitors are growing year-on-year in the post-Covid era. The number of visitors in 2024 was 5.448m, an increase of 18% since the previous year. This has had a direct impact on employment, Direct expenditure from tourists accumulated to £565.96m in 2024, with Accommodation accounting for approximately 42% of the total figure. A breakdown of the distribution of economic impact by sector can be found in figure 11.

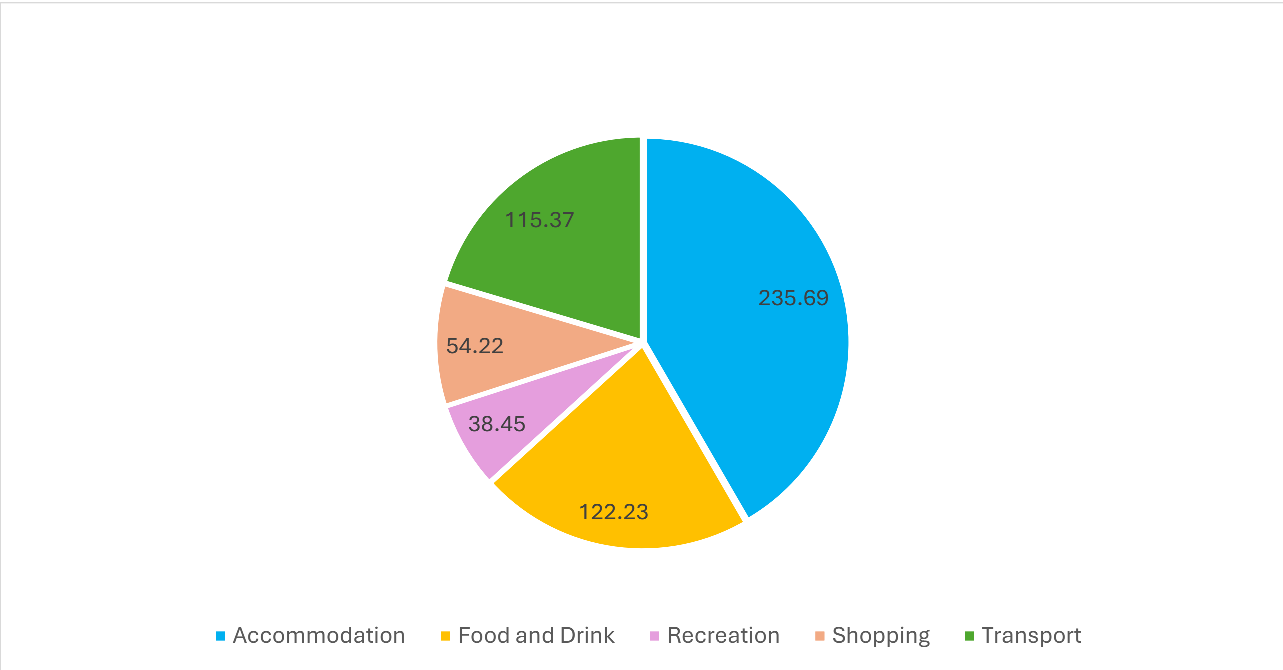

Figure 11: Sectoral distribution of economic impact in Argyll and Bute (£m) (2024)

Tourism plays a key role in employment in Argyll and Bute. There has been a 26% rise in total employment figures over the last 10 years in the sector, split across the sectors above, with a total employment figure of 10,925 in 2024. However, there has been a decrease in the number of those employed directly by serviced accommodation. This correlates with a rise in the number of stays in non-serviced accommodation, such as short term lets. There has been exponential growth in non-serviced accommodation over the past 10 years with visitor numbers and economic impact experiencing around a 150% rise in this time period, causing strain on existing housing stock. This issue is included in Topic Paper 13: Housing and 19: Rural Development and Tourism

Marine and Aquaculture

Argyll and Bute's geographical location and features play not only an important role in the tourism sector, however, also play a vital role in the marine and aquaculture industries. As noted in Topic Paper 22: Aquaculture, it makes a significant contribution to the local economy, with year-round employment and supporting other employment sectors, such as transportation. Key industries in this sector include salmon farming, finfish farming and shellfish farming.

Invest in Argyll estimated the sector to contribute to approximately £31m in GVA to the local economy, through £12m in salaries and over 600 jobs. Over a ten-year period, the marine economy grew 7% in terms of GVA. More information on the sector can be found in Topic Paper 22: Aquaculture.

Food and Drink

The food and drink industry is an important economic sector in Argyll and Bute, with a focus on local, fresh produce, especially seafood due to its coastal location and world-renowned whisky through two distinct whisky districts, Islay and Campbeltown. In 2019, there were over 3000 employees across 820 registered food and drink businesses in Argyll and Bute, creating a turnover of £124m for the local economy. Statistics from Glic show that the region of Argyll and Bute has a food and drink sector worth over £500m, employing 10% of the working population in the area. The Council's economic strategy emphasises the importance of this industry and requirement to maximise the value of the sector.

All of the industries and sectors mentioned above are not acknowledged in the Industry and Business audit in detail, with the audit primarily focusing on the delivery of allocated employment sites in LDP2. Despite this, Argyll and Bute Council understand the importance of these industries to the local, regional and national economy.

These sectors are also resource intensive, requiring a large amount of energy or natural resources. Therefore, in order to deliver economic growth LDP3 will continue to monitor the infrastructure capability of sites within the current plan and potentially identify new sites for allocation where infrastructure capability can be met.

HMNB Clyde

Located at Faslane, the HMNB Clyde is Scotland's largest military establishment and the second largest employment site with over 6500 military and civilian personnel. Aside from the Council itself, industries relating to defence, including HMNB, is the largest employer in the local authority. The base provides facilities of critical national importance from a defence perspective, and both directly and indirectly contributes to the local economy through employment and expenditure. The base underpins a substantial regional labour market and supply chain, not only within Argyll and Bute, but beyond, forming functional relationships with the wider Clyde corridor and the Glasgow City region.

The Government recently pledged £250m over the next three years (2025-2028) through the Clyde Transformation Programme to further defence spending to meet operational requirements and increase capacity through critical infrastructure projects. It forms a broader redevelopment strategy, including the Clyde 2070 programme which involves multi-billion-pound investments to modernise the base over the next generation, making the base a resilient and sustainable naval hub.

The base and naval operations continue to play a significant role in the local economy. To accommodate the planned growth, the Council remains committed to working closely with HMNB to establish land requirements in and around Faslane for further economic investment. For example, the Helensburgh Strategic Development Framework (HSDF) looks at sustainable planning within the region over the next 20-40 years. One reason that this project is being undertaken is the planned expansion and investment in HMNB Clyde, requiring the Council to consider home provision and infrastructure improvements in and around Helensburgh.

Argyll and Bute Business Improvement Districts

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a geographically defined area, where businesses come together and agree to invest collectively in projects and services the businesses believe will improve their trading environment. BID projects are new and additional projects and services; they do not replace services that are already provided by Argyll and Bute Council and other statutory bodies. They operate for up to five years, and after this period if businesses wish to continue a BID, a renewal ballot must take place.

BIDs are developed, managed, and paid for by those who are liable to pay non-domestic rates (NDR) by means of a compulsory levy, which the eligible persons in the proposed BID area must vote in favour of, before the BID can be established. Each eligible person liable to pay the BID levy will be able to vote on whether the BID goes ahead. Priorities for each of the BIDs within the Business Plans are identified through consultation with levy players.

Argyll and Bute Council have a number of BID's running which are detailed further below. The information relating to income and expenditure has been taken from the respective Business Plans for each area, and that figures listed below are forecast.

Dunoon BID

Dunoon Presents is the town's Business Improvement District organisation who run cultural events throughout the year and deliver a series of projects that benefit the local business economy and community. The BID Area includes the major shopping and commercial streets within the town – all those included in the first BID term. The BID area encompasses approximately 430 properties, and the zone reflects the main business and commercial area. The BID zone is highlighted in figure 14.

The BID has been in operation for over a decade with some key achievements including:

- Drive In Cinema
- European Water Ski Racing Championships
- Markets
- Argyll Rally
- Doon the Watter Music Festival
- Dunoon Dazzles Winterfest
- Enduro Mountain Biking
- Aqua Adrenaline Power Boat Championships Round 6
- Sunset Ceremony
- Cowalfest
- Dunoon Gifttcard
- Punk on the Peninsula

The current BID term runs from April 2023 – April 2028 and aims to improve economic opportunities for the businesses in the town centre, increase footfall and improve relationships between businesses and with the local authority and community. It also seeks to market the area to a local, regional and national audience by giving businesses a strong, unified voice and supporting community groups in the area whose aims align with the BID. Figure 12 below details the income and figure 13 provides an overview of the expenditure of the BID Levy, accounting for a potential 10% increase in the levy if made by the BID board in years 3, 4 and 5.

INCOME	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3*	YEAR 4*	YEAR 5*	TOTAL
BID LEVY	£130,000	£130,000	£143,000	£143,000	£143,000	£689,000

Figure 12: Table of income and expenditure of Dunoon BID

EXPENDITURE	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3*	YEAR 4*	YEAR 5*	TOTAL
EVENTS	£65,000	£65,000	£72,500	£72,500	£72,500	£347,500
SPACE	£11,000	£11,000	£14,500	£14,500	£14,500	£65,500
COLLABORATION	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
IDENTITY	£10,000	£10,000	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000	£56,000
OPERATING COSTS	£38,000	£38,000	£38,000	£38,000	£38,000	£190,000
CONTINGENCY	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£25,000
KPI INDICATORS	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£5,000
TOTAL	£130,000	£130,000	£143,000	£143,000	£143,000	£689,000

Figure 13: Table detailing expenditure of Dunoon BID

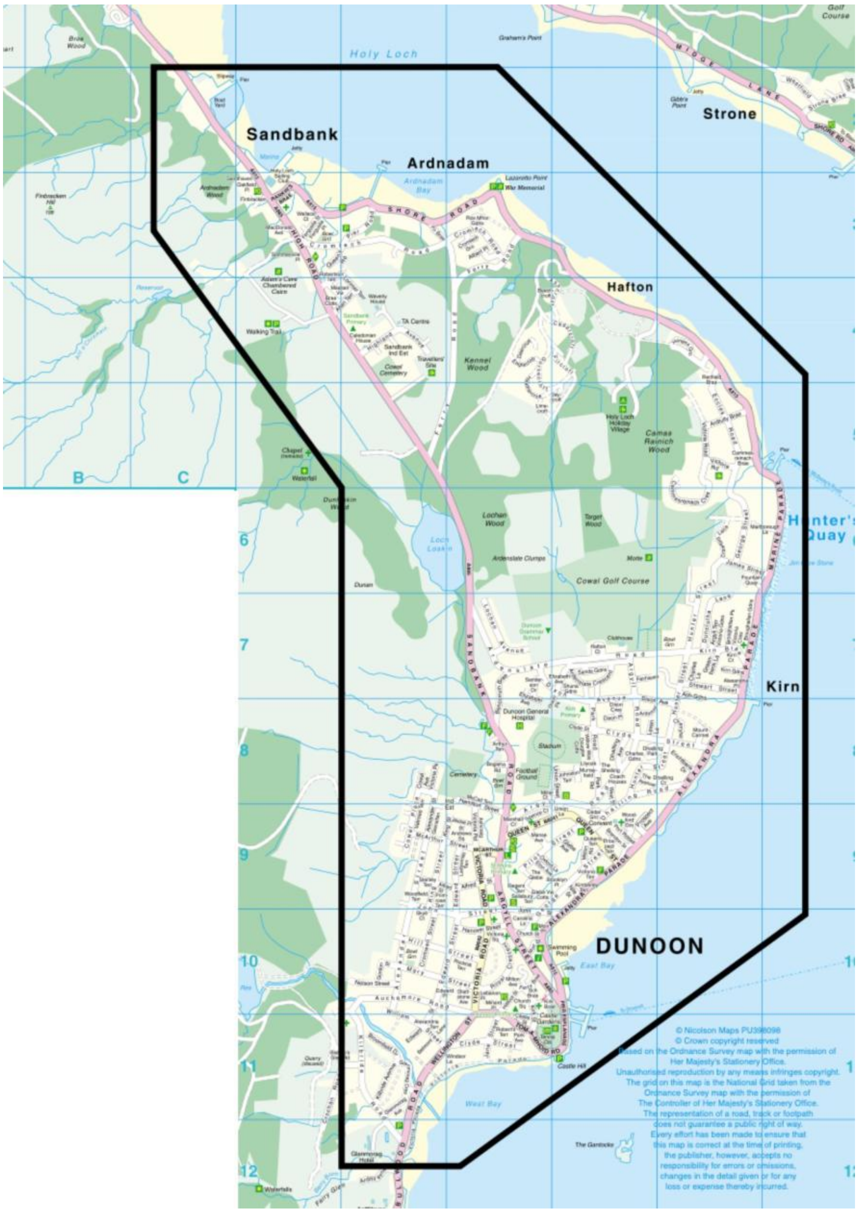

Figure 14: Map of area covered by Dunoon BID

Isle of Bute BID

The BID plan for Bute was published in 2021 and was the first BID to cover an entire island community.

The BID has three key themes for action which are:

1. Marketing and promotion
2. Environment and image
3. Business support, facilitation, and advocacy

Businesses within the BID will contribute to a total levy of £132,515 per annum which equates to £662,575 of income over the five-year duration between 2021 and 2026. The table below (figure 15) provides the budget plan and summary for the island BID.

EXPENDITURE	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5	TOTAL
Marketing & Promoting the Isle of Bute	£32,000	£32,000	£32,000	£32,000	£32,000	£160,000
Supporting Growing Business	£15,815	£15,815	£15,815	£15,815	£15,815	£79,075
Alfresco and Markets Street Scene & Environment	£22,000	£22,000	£22,000	£22,000	£22,000	£110,000
Management, Presence & Running Costs	£54,000	£54,000	£54,000	£54,000	£54,000	£270,000
CONTINGENCY	£8,700	£8,700	£8,700	£8,700	£8,700	£43,500
TOTAL	£132,515	£132,515	£132,515	£132,515	£132,515	£662,575

Figure 15: Table detailing expenditure of Isle of Bute BID

The BID is due for a review in 2026 and if it is continued, LDP3 will consider the aims and objectives of the Bute BID further down the plan preparation process. The Bute BID is currently running its first term, with some key achievements reached including:

- Produced and distributed a multilingual map of the island

- Delivered a business support and improvement grants scheme
- Delivered a range of events including Christmas lighting events and a Celtic Cousins traditional music festival
- Ran a marketing campaign that included adverts on M8 billboards, at Central Station and Glasgow subway
- Installed and manage a digital notice board

BID4OBAN

The BID for Oban was renewed in 2022, running until 2027, and focuses on delivering projects and services which improve the trading environment to benefit businesses, their customers and visitors to the town. The BID has 550 businesses contributing towards the levy, providing a levy of £200,000 per annum.

The key achievements are listed in the BID4OBAN business plan; however, some are listed below for further context:

- Oban Live – open air music festival which has generated £1.4m per annum
- Full town Wi-Fi – in place since 2018 and has been highly beneficial to visitors in particular who can avoid costly roaming charges if the network is accessed by mobile phones or tablets.
- Support for Small Cruise Ships using pontoons, Port of Oban Cruise Group developed and welcoming over 150 cruise ships arriving in Oban.
- Fireworks displays 5th November, Hogmanay, generating substantial economic impact
- BID4OBAN town markets introduced

Businesses within the BID will contribute to a total levy of £188,362 per annum which equates to £941,810 of income over the five-year period. The tables below (figure 16 and 17) provides the budget plan and summary for the BID4OBAN.

INCOME	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3*	YEAR 4*	YEAR 5*	TOTAL
BID LEVY	£188,362	£188,362	£188,362	£188,362	£188,362	£941,810

Figure 16: Table of income of BID4OBAN

EXPENDITURE	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5	TOTAL
Events	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£150,000
Environment	£24,000	£24,000	£24,000	£24,000	£24,000	£120,000
Marketing Locally	£19,000	£19,000	£19,000	£19,000	£19,000	£95,000
Working Together	£17,944	£17,944	£17,944	£17,944	£17,944	£89,720
Running Costs	£69,000	£69,000	£69,000	£69,000	£69,000	£345,000
CONTINGENCY	£8,418	£8,418	£8,418	£8,418	£8,418	£42,090
TOTAL	£168,362	£168,362	£168,362	£168,362	£168,362	£841,810

Figure 17: Table detailing expenditure of BID4OBAN

Rural Growth Deal

The Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal was agreed in March 2025, delivering circa £70m investment to develop economic potential in the region. The key priorities are to:

- Deliver at least 300 additional jobs
- Create 6,500 m^2 of new business space
- Deliver training opportunities to over 6,000 students and individuals
- Support local businesses to thrive
- Construct new housing and worker accommodation to help address the local housing emergency
- Generate over 70,000 additional visitors to the area per annum

The programmed brings together a variety of partners who are committed to delivering inclusive economic growth. Upon consultation with communities and stakeholders, a list of proposals were put together to achieve three outcomes:

- **Connecting**: our high-value business sectors with national and international business markets; our local economic successes with national strategic priorities
- **Attracting**: additional skills, training and learning opportunities; new residents, visitors and businesses
- **Growing**: doing more of what works and making more of our natural and built resources

Across Argyll and Bute, many projects are underway to deliver the outcomes of the growth deal. A short summary of some of the projects that are being delivered through the programme are highlighted below:

- Oban Airport Business Park – phase 1 currently under development and proposed site of UAV Hub facility
- European Marine Science Park – proposals for further expansion of this site by Scottish Association for Marine Science and Highlands and Islands Enterprise as part of the Marine Aquaculture Programme. This targets growth in the local blue economy.
- Clyde Engineering and Innovation Centre – proposed business park on the Iona Stables site at Colgrain, Helensburgh. This is being funded from the Rural Growth Deal and UKG Defence Deal Funding. The site is currently allocated in LDP2. Predicted growth in HMNB Clyde could be critical to Helensburgh and Lomond and has links with other initiatives such as the Clyde Mission.
- Rothesay Pavilion / Kintyre Sea Sports – facilities aimed at growing local tourism economy. For example, upon completion, the Rothesay Pavilion is targeting 100,000 visitors per annum post opening.
- Kilmory Business Park – looking at the potential to support Commercial Services with a solar farm within the Kilmory Estate.

- STEM Hub South, Dunoon Grammar School, as a key project within the Rural Skills Accelerator Programme.

Updates on the progress of the projects can be found here. Information relating to town centre projects can be found in Topic Paper 15: Town Centres and Retail.

Culture and Creativity

Argyll and Bute prides itself on having a rich cultural environment and recognises the importance on having creative industries in the area to promote economic growth and a creates a positive image globally. The Council continues to support the growth of this sector, labelling the industry as one of the key priorities in the Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy, under the "PROSPERITY" heading.

Creative Industries in Argyll and Bute

The Scottish Government published a statement for Creative Industries in 2019, emphasising the importance of creative industries, where forward thinking, sustainable business models and ambitious, innovative, pioneering initiatives and ideas are nurtured and developed. The Government's aims is to make Scotland an international leader in creative industries by creating conditions for the industry to grow sustainably, with resilience and triple the bottom line of economic, social, and cultural value.

There are 125 businesses in Argyll and Bute that operating in 'arts, entertainment and recreation' – 115 of these are considered small businesses (0-49 employees). (Scot Gov, 2024). According to NOMIS, 5% of the working population in Argyll and Bute are employed in a creative industry, higher than the national average, accounting for approximately 1750 people. This is higher than the Scottish average, which sits at 3.1%.

Through the growth of the film industry, Argyll and Bute council have been successful in attracting inward investment from a variety of sources across the creative industry sector. In 2025, Argyll and Bute Council received an estimated production spend of £4.8m, an increase from £1.4m in the same period in 2024, from the Council's "Film in Argyll" service. This was spread across 29 productions in the area, along with a further

90 film enquiries. This figure is a substantial increase from 2023 and 2024 figures and continues a three-year upward trend. This growth is likely linked to the establishment of more studios in the central belt as well as UK and Scottish Government incentives for the screen industries. Argyll and Bute continues to reap the rewards of its geographical position in relation to the central belt. Argyll and Bute has one studio/build space, located at The Factory at MACC Business Park.

In October 2025 an update to 'The Economic Value of the Screen Sector in Scotland, 2023' states that the screen sector GVA in 2023 was continuing to grow from £627m in 2021 to £718m in 2023, with an on-track potential growth of £1bn by 20230.

The creative industry sector is recovering to pre-pandemic growth levels and remains a key contributor to the region's economy. Many creative enterprises are based in rural areas, providing opportunities for remote and flexible working.

Culture

Cultural events also play an important role building economic growth and having positive social implications. They bring in significant visitors contributing to increased spending in Argyll and Bute, through hospitality and retail sectors. In turn, this boosts the economic profile of the region. They allow the region to support its world renowned natural and historical heritage, Gaelic language and traditions.

The area has a number of cultural assets, including historic town centres, castles, important archaeological sites. More information on historical, cultural assets can be found in Topic Paper 04: Historic Assets and Places.

Year-round events support more fragile communities where seasonal fluctuations can affect local economies. Some cultural events that support Argyll's economy include Oban's Sea Shanty Festival, Jura Music Festival and the Mull Rally. Oban has also been nominated as the location to host the Royal National Mòd, a week-long Gaelic and cultural festival attracting thousands of competitors. The Council anticipates that this will generate around £3.6m for the local economy. A full list of cultural events is published by Wild About Argyll & The Isles.

Oban is regarded as the most visited place in Argyll and Bute, with a historical town centre, coastal scenery and important maritime heritage. It acts as a gateway to the islands, with the busiest ferry port in Argyll and Bute, attracting around 600,000 passengers annually.

LiveArgyll is the Council's charity-based leisure trust that manages many of the culture and leisure facilities in the region. These facilities help promote the Scottish Government objectives, promoting health and wellbeing, reducing inequality, including increasing digital inclusion in areas with limited network capacity. They currently operate:

- 11 libraries
- 5 leisure centres
- 4 event halls

In addition, the Council provides a list of cultural venues, such as museums and cinemas on their website.

Culture Heritage and Arts Assembly, Argyll and Isles (CHARTS) is a growing network of creative and heritage practitioners, including artists, makers, producers and spaces who value creativity and the impact it has on individuals and communities. It has 733 members providing free resources, opportunities and events in Argyll and Bute. Through their support, development on critical cultural infrastructure has been developed, such as the Rothesay Pavilion which is currently undergoing significant redevelopment.

Argyll and Bute has no dedicated map of cultural or community venues that play an important role in the economic and creative sectors in the area. However, mapping of cultural and community assets can be found online through the Argyll & Bute Community Directory, provided by Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface and the Argyll & Isles Heritage Map, published by Argyll & Bute Museums & Heritage Forum.

Community halls play a fundamental role in supporting cultural and creative events. These halls are often volunteer or committee led, supporting the principles of community wealth building, governance and participation. The halls vary in size, though most are adaptable to host a number of cultural, social or creative events. A full list of village halls can be found here.

Gaelic Language

Argyll and Bute historically, is the heartland of Scots Gaelic. The language has been spoken in the region since the 5th century, and its history has been a key element in developing both local and national culture. According to the 2022 census, 6.2% have some skills in Gaelic, the third highest figure across all authorities in Scotland.

Argyll and Bute is home to several Key Gaelic Communities as identified by the Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic, namely Tiree, Islay, and Jura. The report highlights the potential of investment in Gaelic to deliver against a range of outcomes in the National Performance Framework. A baseline assessment in May 2012 undertaken by a range of partners including Argyll and Bute Council found the potential economic value of Gaelic to the Scottish economy to be in the region of £81.6m to £148.5m, much of which is currently unrealised.

The Argyll and Bute Gaelic Language Plan states that whilst the census data illustrates a decline in Gaelic language, it is widely recognised and has a growing interest in Gaelic music and cultural events, particularly with young people. One way in which the Council facilitates the promotion of the language and culture is through the Gaelic Centre in Oban called ‘Furan’ that is a hub for learning the language at all ages. The Language Plan makes a commitment to the promotion of Gaelic education, language, cultural and economic activities that promote the language through awareness raising and learning opportunities for children, employees and the communities.

The Scottish Government recently passed the Scottish Languages Act which gives recognition of Gaelic and Scots as official language status. The Act establishes statutory duties to address the needs of Gaelic speakers in school, work, home and across communities, ensuring that the language is supported.

The Act allows for Areas of Linguistic Significance be designated if:

- at least 20% of the area’s population has Gaelic language skills,

- if the area does not contain a significant number of people with Gaelic language skills but the area is historically connected with the use of Gaelic,
- if the area is one in which teaching and learning by means of the Gaelic language is provided,
- the area is one in which significant activity relating to the Gaelic language or Gaelic culture takes place.

Argyll and Bute Council has the ability to designate all or part of the local authority area as an area of linguistic significance. This is due to be considered within the 1 year of the section comes into force, and each subsequent 5-year period thereafter. It is considered by Argyll and Bute Council that island communities may be Areas of Linguistic Significance.

As part of the Act, public authorities must have regard to promoting, facilitating and supporting the use of Gaelic language and developing and encouraging Gaelic Culture. In terms of promoting the language through Education, the Scottish Government allocates funding to support the growth of the languages, including the establishment of Gaelic Schools where there is demand.

The preparation of LDP3 will take into account the statutory obligations relating to the Gaelic language, including the promotion and support of the language.

Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building (CWB) seeks to transform local and regional economic systems to enable local communities and people to own, have a greater stake in, access and benefit from the wealth our economy generates. It aligns with other Council priorities and statutory duties, such as economic development. It aims to prevent wealth extraction and promote broad ownership and generative wealth with deep local roots. In harnessing the economic leverage of local organisations, such as local councils, Community Wealth Building has the potential to:

- create jobs
- shorten and strengthen supply chains

- strengthen local and regional economies

The Scottish Government has recently passed the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill which requires the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Ministers to prepare and publish a statement about CWB. In addition, the Act will require local authorities to prepare and implement a CWB action plan. The aims of the Act are to reduce economic and wealth inequality between individuals and communities in and across Scotland and to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth, by facilitating and supporting the generation, circulation and retention of wealth in local and regional economies LDP3 will take the Act and any associated guidance into account.

Community Wealth Building in Argyll and Bute – A Framework for Action

In partnership with Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnerships, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) undertook a report to gain a deeper understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges Argyll and Bute faces in implementing a CWB approach. The report identifies the main challenges in the local authority area, namely a housing crisis, depopulation, and the adverse effects of market-driven economic practices.

Community Wealth Building in Argyll and Bute provides a comprehensive framework for implementing a Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach in the area. It calls for a shift toward a more equitable, community centred economic model, rooted in CWB principles and in alignment with Scotland's broader commitment to a wellbeing economy.

The strategy is built around five key pillars. These are: -

Spending aims to establish a CPP procurement working group. This will allow for building collective market intelligence, publish a collective procurement pipeline. It will also allow for CPP meet the buyer events and developing training opportunities for suppliers.

Workforce looks to ensure living wages and fair employment conditions and opportunities for Argyll and Bute residents.

Inclusive Ownership seeks to identify ownership opportunities in growth sectors, review cooperative, community, and employee ownership of assets and businesses to help retain wealth locally.

Finance seeks to develop alternative financial mechanisms such as community bonds, credit unions, and local investment strategies to support local economic development.

Land and Property aims to maximise the value of land and property for local communities by promoting community-led ownership and addressing vacant or derelict land.

A comprehensive framework for action to deliver the outcomes is outlined, with an emphasis on ensuring that CWB principles are embedded into national and local economic strategies. CWB principles should also be embedded in the Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan provides a framework for action to deliver on the outcomes. The report also seeks to establish governance and leadership, encouraging a CWB steering group and the formation of time-limited working groups. The groups can deliver specific actions, specifically support employee ownership and build community/shared ownership of renewable energy.

Challenges are highlighted in the report, including a lack of co-ordination between stakeholders, issues around funding and capacity which can limit the full potential of CWB in Argyll and Bute. These issues can limit the ability to fully implement CWB across the region.

The framework identifies land use as being important in tackling some of the key issues affecting CWB, such as the climate and housing emergency. It is recommended that a local landowners forum could be established to tackle these issues, ensuring that land is used in a socially productive way wherever possible.

Argyll and Bute Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2024-2034 (ABOIP)

Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) have a statutory obligation to create a 10-year Outcomes Improvement Plan under the provisions of the Community Empowerment

(Scotland) Act 2015. The plan has been developed through community engagement, requiring residents to choose three key themes for the ABOIP to tackle.

The CPP management group is a number of organisations and community representatives who work together to achieve improvements across these three outcomes in ways which promote prevention, reduce inequalities and build community capacity.

The ABOIP identifies three key priorities through extensive public engagement, gathering around 2000 responses, which are:

- Transport Infrastructure
- Housing
- Community Wellbeing

Community Wellbeing is described in the ABOIP as "the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential."

This includes accessing formal and informal support and places providing opportunities for emotional and cultural attachment, leisure and work, skills development and travel, and shops and facilities. It is also about the power that people have to participate in having a valuable input in what happens in their community.

The ABOIP looks to improve community wellbeing by:

- Broadening equality of access to Community Leadership opportunities
- Furthering equality of access to services, facilities and community assets
- Working with partners to maximise sustainability of community facilities and services Enabling a voice in collective decision making
- Enhancing communication within communities
- Better understanding how communities achieve a sense of connection and belonging

Community Asset Transfer (CAT)

In 2023, The Scottish Government published the Community Ownership in Scotland 2022 which looks at the official nationwide statistics for community ownership in Scotland. As of 2022, 754 assets were in community ownership, with Argyll and Bute Council containing 97 community owned assets. This equates to approximately 5806ha in total land in community ownership. Of the 97 assets, 58 community groups are active in managing these assets across the council area.

Argyll and Bute Council published annual reports outlining the expression of interests and the completion of asset transfers in the area. These can be found here.

The figures over the last five years show little to no uptake on Community Asset Transfers. The Council works collaboratively with community groups using the informal Expression of Interest (EOI) process which allows them to achieve their aims without having to utilise the statutory Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process. The lack of formal requests is reflected in how well the informal process is operating and there has been several, successful asset transfers by lease or sale using this process over the last few years.

The Council retains an asset register which indicates the land or buildings available for a community asset transfer in accordance with section 94 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. A map of all assets within this register can be found through the Council's Land and Property Assets map.

Third Sector Interface

Within the region, the Third Sector interface (TSI) play a key role in being a beacon of support and development for the third sector and CWB. They encompass charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations, working towards enriching the community without the drive for private profit. They are one of 32 TSI's across Scotland and aim to cultivate capacity, encourage collaboration and provide essential resources and advice. Examples of work they have been involved in across the region can be found here.

Argyll Funding Platform

As part of the Third Sector Interface, a funding platform is available. The platform identifies:

- Opportunities for funding
- Support in finding the right funding for communities and businesses
- Application feedback including a tailored service to make sure the bid has the best chance of success
- Fund management which allows for the TSI to manage and distribute funds on behalf of other organisations

At the time of writing, there is currently over £18m worth of funding available within Argyll and Bute.

External Grant Funding

Argyll and Bute Council manages numerous external grant funds, some of which can be used to deliver community priority projects. The principles of CWB are embedded in these grants, with the Council requiring proposal to demonstrate alignment with CWB. The Council has also created a monthly funding alert, allowing communities to understand closing date for funding applications. An overview of the grants and funding available from the Council can be found here.

Local Place Plans

Luing

Luing LPP supports new facilities to support community life and creativity but must not detract from or compete with existing community assets. The LPP sets out that these facilities include business needs. It makes specific reference to a Housing & Business Needs Assessment for the island that will cover the business needs, including creative industries, to ascertain what developments

The LPP provides detailed site plans for each settlement which highlight proposed business and industry space, including workshops, studios and retail.

Cove and Kilcreggan

The LPP highlights the economic downturn, fragile local economy, commuter pressure and lack of jobs as a key challenge of the area. It places an emphasis on ensuring the economic sustainability of the centre of Kilcreggan Village which acts as a service and transport hub. The LPP understands the fragility of rural villages and states that Argyll and Bute's economic development policies need to be applied to ensure the sustainability of its businesses and employment, as well as stimulation of new small-scale businesses and services.

CWB is also identified of a key challenge for the area, with an unmet housing need, decline of assets, a lack of renewable energy schemes and identifying potential assets.

Ford (not yet validated)

The LPP identifies the community demand for an honesty shop in ford. This would allow for the community to manage a retail service in line with Policy 25 of NPF4. The shop would provide a local service with the current nearest shop over 10 miles away.

A proposal for a new community hall that would be community owned is also considered in the plan. This is one of the key themes throughout the plan and the community believe that the proposal would contribute to the viability, sustainability and diversity of rural communities and local rural economy in line with NPF4.

Gigha

The LPP dedicates a section to people and employment. The section sets out the main employers and industries on the island. This includes identifying tourism and visitor-based enterprises provide the main economic backstay for the island and are the largest employers across both accommodation and visitor sectors.

Helensburgh (not yet validated)

Helensburgh's draft Local Place Plan references a number of economic opportunities in the town. Specific reference is made to encouraging a diverse high street economy and supporting active travel routes to boost the tourism economy. The LPP makes reference to the climate crisis which can affect the local economy and wellbeing of the town. Within the LPP, there is a suggestion to redesignate the existing business and industry allocation (B2001) within LDP2 for the use of activities of low economic and personal risk to flooding, for example, allotments or retain the nature-based solution of the site as a natural flood plain. Furthermore, the Waterfront and Pier area is seen as a way to boost the local town's economy, through the re-development of the Waterfront site and the introduction of an operational pier.

A number of proposals are put forward which can improve the CWB in the town. These are the redevelopment of the waterfront area, and protection of independent businesses in the town centre, saving key assets such as the Tower Arts Centre, and the development of indoor multi-use facilities.

Summary of Engagement

A working draft version of this template was shared with Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface, and the relevant BID programmes mentioned in the topic paper. Representations submitted at the working draft stage are summarised below:

Scottish Enterprise

Comments note the value of extending the Industry and Business land audit to account for demand longer term requirements for employment land in Argyll and Bute, however, recognise that the 2025 audit is a starting point for the development of data. Overall, they were happy that the topic paper provides sufficient evidence.

Comment:

The Council plans to undertake further work and research to understand business needs and demands and will include these in the forthcoming audit.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Provided feedback in the context of their own regional economic strategy in which HIE identifies Argyll and Bute as a priority location for regional economic transformation, with HIREP/Eskogen Research identifying £14.6bn of potential investment in key economic sectors. Notably, comments were made regarding the availability of land to support these sectors, requesting the council to ensure that current allocated sites meet demand and are in the right locations, and can meet the infrastructure needs of resource-intensive sectors and uses. Furthermore, comments state that the audit does not make reference to key sectors such as marine, aquaculture and food and drink industries.

Comments were also raised with regard to having a concurrent approach to employment and housing developments, ensuring that employment sites and uses are allocated in areas with a population to retain a working age population and understanding that workers need accommodation to support it.

HIE would encourage the council to:

- Revisit the conclusions drawn on employment land supply to ensure they reflect the location and type of sites needed by priority sectors, rather than uptake rates alone;
- Ensure future land needs of marine, aquaculture and coastal industries are assessed directly, given their activity is not captured in the audit;
- Have regard to the utility and digital infrastructure of target sectors when considering employment land; and
- Plan employment land and housing allocations together, taking account of the workforce attraction challenge identified in the Topic Paper's own population data.

Comment:

The planning authority understand that the industry and business audit only provides detail on the uptake and delivery of LDP2's allocated employment sites and only provides a little context as to why completions relating to the key industries in HIE's feedback are not included. These sectors contribute significantly to the local and regional economy though are often restricted to use under a single user. For example, a large extension to a whisky distillery would contribute substantially to local economic growth but is within the curtilage of the existing business premises, therefore has not been included in the figures. Through LDP3, Argyll and Bute Council is committed to supporting these sectors and developments and that their economic impact is not unnoticed.

With regards to the industry and business audit, through internal discussions with the Council's economic development team and Highlands and Islands Enterprise during the production of the audit, it was established that some of the sites currently allocated are constrained with regards to infrastructure, whether that be access into the site, or sites with limited access to digital infrastructure. A review of each site will be undertaken as part of the process working towards the production of LDP3. Argyll and Bute agree that some sites in the current plan do not align with the current business needs and demand in the area, and that small-scale sites and sites with access to natural resources such as water are increasingly in demand. Therefore, the Council will seek to ensure that any sites matching these criteria are considered for inclusion in LDP3.

HIE touch on the importance of planning employment land and housing supply concurrently. Much of the employment land supply are situated in key settlements within Argyll and Bute, or in proximity to key rural settlements. The Council recognises that the working age population is declining and therefore it is imperative to promote economic growth in the region to provide employment opportunities across all sectors. Argyll and Bute Council agree that housing stock to support workers in the region is required.

Ministry of Defence (MOD)

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation provided a response to the Council's previous tranche of topic papers. Within the comments, they mention the importance of HMNB Clyde and its impact on the local economy and employment markets. Whilst they were not directly contacted during the key agency engagement stage, this paper will be sent directly to the MOD for comment during the public engagement stage. Any comments provided during this period will be taken into consideration before the final preparation of the evidence report.

Key agencies and stakeholders that were consulted but the Council received no response from are:

- Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface
- ButeBID
- Dunoon Presents
- Bid4Oban

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

The increase in an ageing population combined with a decrease in working age population is a challenge in the area. Action has to be taken to improve employment opportunities and housing stock to attract new economically active residents to Argyll and Bute and retain the current working-age population.

A significant proportion of people employed in Argyll and Bute work in the public sector. With forecasted budget constraints this may put additional pressure on the local employment market.

NPF4 requires LDP's to allocate sufficient land to meet the future business and industry needs through a range of sites of varying sizes. The Business and Industry audit conducted by the Planning Authority shows that uptake on allocated sites is low, with many of the sites having constraints that impact immediate development. The planning authority will review the inclusion of sites where no interest or development has taken place which will inform the future industry and business allocations in LDP3.

LDP2 includes areas as established business and industrial areas which are designated for Class 4 (Business), Class 5 (General Industrial), or Class 6 (Storage and Distribution). These sites were identified as being in, or around, town centres where demand is more prevalent. This, and the strategic economic investment locations, ensure sites for business uses are safeguarded and signposted to more appropriate locations. The sites should be reviewed to ensure that they are still being actively used and are operational with business and industry uses.

LDP3 should look to safeguard valuable, cultural assets and facilities, to continue to make them accessible and sustainable. This includes resisting the loss of venues where possible and supporting proposals for new or replacement facilities.

LDP3 will consider whether any specific policies and planning guidance may be created on how the plan aligns with the Community Wealth Building Strategy for the area. This may include identification and inclusion of key areas in this sector within the spatial strategy.

LDP3 will continue to promote Local Place Plans as a way for community bodies to engage with the planning process and ensure they are made aware of the avenues to receive support for community wealth building projects. This includes identifying CAT processes and engaging with community bodies on potential funding and grant schemes available for proposals.

Areas identified as having higher levels of deprivation, through the SIMD and other Council studies should be factored into the LDP3 approach to Community Wealth Building.