

John McLuckie 0:18

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Podcast. I'm John McLuckie, Partnerships Lead for Community Planning in Argyll and Bute, and joining me on the podcast today to talk about Community Wealth Building are Ishabel Bremner, Economic Growth Manager at Argyll and Bute Council, and Takki Sulaiman, Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface. Welcome both to the podcast.

Takki Sulaiman 0:44

Hi, John.

Ishabel Bremner 0:46

Hi, John. Nice to be here.

John McLuckie 0:47

Thanks for joining me. So, if I could start with yourself, Takki, could you tell us a bit about your role within Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface?

Takki Sulaiman 0:52

I'm Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface and third sector interfaces, there's one for each council area of Scotland. Our main job is to support charities, social enterprises and communities to thrive and prosper and what that means in practice is that we give guidance to charities, guidance to communities if they want to set up an organisation to become a SCIO, to become a social enterprise, and that means practical support with business planning, charity law, trustee advice and the like. And the second role really is about advocacy and working with council

partners and health partners and other public bodies to advocate for the role, the partnership role and the collaborative role that third sector organisations can play with the public sector.

John McLuckie 1:39

Really interesting, thanks very much Takki. We'll go into how all that links in with Community Wealth Building a bit later, but for yourself, Ishabel, could you tell us a bit about your role within Argyll and Bute Council?

Ishabel Bremner 1:50

Yes, thanks, John. Yes, my role is, as you've mentioned, is the Economic Growth Manager at Argyll and Bute Council. I've got a fairly wide remit covering Business Gateway, employability, sectoral development, and one of the key areas is community-led local development funding, which kind of ties in very nicely with the Community Wealth Building agenda. So, given that Community Wealth Building is an approach to economic development, I'll be one of the key officers in the council to be taking forward the operational aspects of the Community Wealth Building Act in terms of what we need to do as a council. So, it ties in quite nicely with all the work we're doing and given the fact we do a lot of work on in terms of economic intelligence, so that data and evidence in terms of what we require, will help drive that agenda as well. So, looking forward to getting my teeth into this particular agenda going forward.

Currently, we have been looking at embedding some of what they call the measures of Community Wealth Building within our review of our Economic Strategy Action Plan, which is going to our committee meeting this week, in terms of initial review, but we hope to revamp that and have a final plan going to our members in terms of the Environment Development and Infrastructure Committee at the end of this calendar year. So, Community Wealth Building is going to be a key theme within that review of our Economic Strategy Action Plan.

John McLuckie 3:14

Yeah, really interesting and I think within the landscape of community planning, and I'm sure in a wider landscape as well, you both mentioned the term Community Wealth Building there, it's becoming more and more of a conversation. In some of the conversations, there's been some questions around what actually Community Wealth Building means, both in terms of an approach and also in terms of what that might mean in practice. Takki, I wonder if you could give us a sense of your interpretation of Community Wealth Building.

Takki Sulaiman 3:42

Yes, you're absolutely right John. Community Wealth Building is another one of those names that can mean multiple things to multiple people, but it's actually a very specific thing and it is defined in the legislation as well. Specifically, it's an economic development methodology, but it's got five pillars, and that's the language of Community Wealth Building. The first one is around spending and at its source, it's around making sure that the wealth created in an area is spent in the area, is used in the area, and is generated in a way that's not extractive, because we're all familiar with the way that the global economy is moving. So, it's not just a feature in Scotland, it's not just a feature of Argyll and Bute. The way the global economy is moving is you have large corporations, very wealthy individuals buying up land, there's the technology giants who have a massive impact on our high streets. This is a response to that kind of move, to try to make sure that our local economy is responsive, is fair to local communities and has a model of inclusive ownership. So those five pillars again are around spending, so that means that local authorities should spend and local public bodies should spend in their locality as much as possible, and for Argyll and Bute Council, that means they spend at least 36%, and I'm sure Ishabel will correct me on that, which is a good figure. But, I think for the NHS, they will struggle to hit that kind of figure. There's fair employment, which means that people are paid fairly for their work so they can be not just economically productive but can afford to live in the area and can afford to live well. Then there's an issue around land and property, again, another hugely complex pillar. This is

around making sure that the land around us can be used for the community's benefit and there's lots of spin-offs on that, we can talk about that a little bit later, and then inclusive ownership is pillar four, and that's the things around, you know, social enterprises, co-ops, can we use those types of economic structures to ensure that the wealth is not extracted but is instead returned to the local community? And then the fifth is around finance, how do we get the finance to support these inclusive models of the economy? That could be social credit, that could be local banks, that could be lending that allows for much smaller scale micro investments. So, Community Wealth Building, it started around the 2000s in the United States, particularly through organisations like the Democracy Collaborative in Cleveland in the US.

And then there's the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, based in Manchester, and they're an organisation that drove the model of Community Wealth Building throughout England and indeed in Scotland, and there's a long history. We have one of the founders, if you like, of the Democracy Collaborative is based in Argyll and Bute, that's Neil McNroy, and Neil McNroy and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies were commissioned to write a report for Argyll and Bute by the Community Planning Partnership via the TSI, but on behalf of the CPP, which is the important thing, to look at where we were, look at the opportunities that had been exploited elsewhere around Scotland for Community Wealth Building and to try to adopt that for Argyll and Bute. And that report produced 23 recommendations built on those five pillars and it identified two models of opportunity, and that's kind of where we're at.

It's a really, really interesting yet challenging arena. It's important to state that there's no extra money for Community Wealth Building and it needs money if we're to change the way that we structure our local economy and to support investment in these new ways that embody those five pillars. We will need to find some extra money from somewhere. So, it's a really interesting agenda, but massively challenging and cuts across lots of different things. So, one of the things is, because we bandy around these terminologies like Community Wealth Building or CWB for short, we think, oh, where does it fit into all the other bits and bobs? Well, the Government has recently announced a new programme for government. In it, as its centrepiece, was Public Service Reform. Public Service Reform is about rewiring the state and the way that our communities work together, but at its core, Community Wealth Building could help the state, if you like, cope with its reduced budget. We know that for the next 10 years, the budget in the UK, the budget in Scotland, the

budget for Argyll and Bute through the public sector is under immense pressure, but if we can support local communities to generate additional income for themselves, then I think we could be in with a chance of strengthening our communities as well as improving our local economy.

John McLuckie 8:18

Fascinating, thanks very much Takki, that was a pretty comprehensive answer. It covered a lot of aspects of Community Wealth Building there as well. Ishabel, I was just wondering if you would like to add anything in terms of what you would consider a definition of Community Wealth Building and also elements of how that's being taken forward in Argyll and Bute.

Ishabel Bremner 8:35

Yeah, thanks for that. Takki gave a very detailed overview there in terms of what we're doing. I think bottom line for me and my economist hat on is a very practical approach to local economic development, embedding what Takki has alluded to in terms of embedding a model of local, inclusive and what we call place-based economic development and it's across Scotland, not just across Argyll and Bute. And through what Takki has talked about, the five pillars of prioritising local ownership, fair work, sustainable growth and the purpose of Community Wealth Building is to ensure that the economic wealth is generated, circulated and retained within local communities, and that's where we need to look at. As Takki has alluded to, the Public Service Reform agenda in terms of the nuances of how we actually retain that wealth locally and circulate within our economy, i.e. that we create greater the multiplier effect in terms of the spend within our economy, but also the supply chain benefits of that, keeping that wealth within the local area. One of the key things I think is really practical about the Act is that it has taken the five pillars of procurement, workforce, land and property, inclusive growth and finance, and they've put these into what they call enabled action-based measures and indicators, which I think again, it's very much about a practical approach to how we take this forward. So, this will also include, as well as the five pillars that we've mentioned, through that

enabled action-based approach. They've also included a focus on local business startups, again which is about wealth creation and retention of that wealth locally, or entrepreneurship and support to boost climate resilience and the mitigation of effects of climate change, and other measures that we see fit to take forward, which will be part of a local Community Wealth Building partnership to consider. And again, that should be explained better in terms of the guidance document that will be coming out with the Community Wealth Building agenda in terms of what do we mean by a Community Wealth Building partnership and who should sit on that. We've got key bodies that need to sit on that particular group, but it would be interesting to see what the practicalities are of how we take that forward. Quite a lot of people say, well, we're doing this already, you know, we're doing it, we're looking at that fair work, we're looking at inclusive ownership, etc. In terms of the council, there are a lot of current activities, particularly on the procurement side. We're part of a supplier development programme and Business Gateway are involved in that too, and there's a lot we are doing to support local community groups, community enhancement, targeting recruitment and training, work placements, curriculum support, small to medium-sized enterprises, support to them through the economic growth agenda. But, one of the key areas in terms of workforce that I've been working on and we'll be aligning with our partners such as Takki on this, is the Workforce Argyll and Bute Roadmap. It's based on the Workforce North approach, and again, that particular piece of work is really going to highlight the Fair Work agenda going forward. So, there are key areas of work, just as Takki is saying, we need to ensure that Community Wealth Building, this practical approach, is woven into a lot of the work that we are doing and currently underway with the council, aligned to the principles that we need to adhere to. So, we don't want to make it complex, but we need to ensure that we are alive to where this particular approach needs to be embedded.

John McLuckie 12:03

Really interesting and I guess examples within what you were talking about there in terms of what it might look like in practice, some of the building blocks of how that might be taken forward. I'm interested to know the sort of Community Planning Partnership work and the Outcomes Improvement Plan and the three priorities, how

do you think that Community Wealth Building might align with some of the actions that are being taken forward? I'm thinking perhaps, looking at the five pillars, there's land and property that might tie in with the housing priority, and I guess a lot of them might tie in with the community wellbeing in terms of communities' sense of how they're developing and I guess methodologies to help support communities as well. Takki, could I bring you in on that?

Takki Sulaiman 12:45

Absolutely, it's a hugely rich agenda, which is very, very exciting, but it's important to try to pin some of these down and make sure that there's people ready and willing and able to work on some of these. And so, as Ishabel says, there's a lot of work already going on and it's just about weaving them together so that they integrate and all the opportunities can be maximised as a result so that we're all focused in the same direction, and obviously that's one of the core reasons behind a Community Planning Partnership that we have that role and we can make connections where they are needed and where they are possible. As an example of that, you hinted at, was around the community wellbeing approach. There are organisations across Argyll and Bute already delivering wellbeing-type projects, which perhaps have a preventative focus. But can we do that a bit more consistently? Is that based on local resource and research and local need? and can we match that up with the workforce element, the housing element, as well as some investment funding. And, so, I'm aware for instance, and full disclosure here, I'm on the board of a group, the Orchy and Awe Community Trust, they're in conversations with NHS partners and our local HSCP to look at a social care model, a care at home-type model that they might train local people to help older people and people with support needs to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, which is good for the community, it's good for the individual, but it's also good for NHS budgets and the outcomes, as I say, for individuals can be better. And there are some organisations doing that already, but it's not done consistently. So, can we provide the support, the training, the knowledge, the know-how to enable those organisations to become self-sustaining type businesses?

And so, another example would be around housing. We've got a lot of economic development going on, a lot of infrastructure building in Argyll and Bute. Can we put together those developers, some of whom are mega public infrastructure developers, and match them with our housing associations to say, well, instead of housing people in hotels, could we work on a patch of land, build some housing and work with the plans already in place, but put them into action with housing associations so that people can stay, live and work in Argyll and Bute for the future? because we do have a housing crisis in Argyll and Bute, but we have to think creatively how we might improve and develop the local housing stock so that it's affordable for local people. So, another example, and I'll stop after this one, this example is around the model of opportunity identified in that initial Community Wealth Building report I was talking about, and there are a number of groups right across Argyll and Bute who are just running with this as an idea. And there's a group in Dunoon who are saying, could we set up a community energy company? could we work with perhaps the mega providers? and could we look at ways of shared ownership between the community and a big, private enterprise to develop that kind of shared model of shared community benefits. So, it's not just that smaller element, which you have to do by law, but a much more inclusive model with perhaps even up to 40, 50% of shared income. But there's lots of conversation to be had about that. There's examples on Gigha, there's examples on Tiree, and of course, we've got the Fyne Homes example of a turbine, but that takes years of development. And one turbine, and I could be wrong here, one turbine costs north of £14 million, but it took them ten years to get to a model, but they're generating income which is going into their local community of at least £100,000 a year. So, this is a really rich vein that we need to mine, so pardon the mixed metaphors there, but there's an opportunity really to think differently about how we organise public services and recycle the wealth that's generated back into our local communities, as well as meeting the needs of shareholders who need to generate a profit too, but it's much more about building that fairer partnership.

Ishabel Bremner 16:42

It's interesting that you talked about the business agenda as well as the housing agenda, and today, the council's empty business property grants have supported the

reduction of empty business properties from 305 to 263 and supported about 40 completed projects with a further 50 in development. So, it facilitated 36 properties returning to use and invested approximately £912,000 into regeneration and business support. So, there's a lot going on and again that is really about bringing back these empty buildings in productive use. And just on that, the Business Gateway has supported 147 new startups during 25-26 and 337 existing businesses supported. So again, that is really key to this generation of wealth and retention of wealth in the local area. We've got a business portal now, this all links to finance and procurement, but they can send in a form to say, look, we're looking to do X, Y and Z, can you help us? If it's not aligned to the grants that we currently have through Business Gateway or the Empty Properties Grant, we can signpost organisations to the relevant place, so, you know, there's a lot going on and that again, it's key to this Community Wealth Building approach to economic development.

John McLuckie 18:03

Some really interesting examples of public sector Community Wealth Building work and, you know, out in the communities as well, like individual community projects. If I could just ask you first Ishabel, we've talked so far about the legislation, Takki mentioned the CLES report that was commissioned for the CPP, and we've talked a bit about how that links together with community planning and some examples of how Community Wealth Building is actually in operation already. What impact do you think Community Wealth Building can have, say, over the next 10 years in Argyll and Bute and maybe as well mixed into that is the Public Sector Reform agenda.

Ishabel Bremner 18:45

I think that's a very interesting question, John. I think the economic impact is going to be in terms of marrying, and we've talked about using the word weaving together this legislation into our current activity, but also in future activity. Community Wealth Building needs to be intrinsic to our Economic Strategy Action Plan. We currently have a strategy, it straddles a 10-year period, 2024 to 2034, and every year we review our action plan and we have embedded some Community Wealth Building actions

within that strategy, as I said at the outset. So, in terms of the economic development landscape across Scotland, you know, I am still the national chair for the Scottish Local Authority Economic Development Group and the key issue there is this is the first time ever that economic development per se has been given some sort of legislative duty. We have powers, but this is the first time we've given this, effectively a statutory duty to our approach to economic development, so, in many respects, I know that having a statutory duty is not a protectionist approach to a particular service delivery, but I think the fact that the Scottish Government is really focused on the economy as one of the key drivers in terms of the Programme for Government, I think this is a new era for economic development across Scotland. The proposal is that there's going to be a substantive reduction in local authorities across Scotland and having more community groups. So, the announcement was made by the Government just a couple of weeks ago on the back of the Programme for Government. Now, this is an opportunity for Argyll and Bute as quite a distinctive area in Scotland, we have now officially 28 inhabited islands and we've got our peninsulas that are like island groups, so there's a lot to be discussed. I know in the Programme for Government, there was status given to the three separate island groups in terms of the Single Authority Model, but I think obviously there's more work to be done in looking at that approach for Argyll and Bute going forward, quite a distinctive area, and I think weaving in what we're already doing and what this agenda could be, really working with our communities, and with these relevant public bodies that need to be signed up to the Community Wealth Building agenda. I think the impact could be quite substantive, that aligns with the Democracy Matters focus as well, in terms of where communities have a voice and that's very much the approach that appears to be that the Scottish Government, given these 110 to 160 or so community groups they want to set up, they really want the communities to be involved in this and have a voice. And where communities don't have a voice, it's up to probably the local authorities that are there to help these communities. Again, there are some very active communities across Argyll and Bute, but we don't want others to be left behind. So, it's difficult to say what the impact will be, but as long as we are aligning that approach and weaving it into our economic development priorities and the priorities for the economy, for the local government, and for the Scottish Government, we could see quite a substantive impact of this agenda going forward.

John McLuckie 21:40

Great, thanks very much, Ishabel, and Takki, for yourself, do you have a sense of how Community Wealth Building might develop and what it might look like in the next decade?

Takki Sulaiman 21:50

Yes, I mean I think, as Ishabel says, when you weave it together with other agendas coming from the Scottish Government, right at the start of their new parliamentary term, this is a real opportunity to look again at how we spend, how we organise, and what that means for our communities, and Ishabel talked about that spend at as local a level as possible. What that could look like, for instance, and again, you know this is a could, not a should or a would, what it could look like is, for instance, the Integration Joint Board on behalf of the local health and social care services spends about £400 million a year. £100 million of that is spent with an SLA with Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and for good reason, right? You know, we can't build a super hospital here in Argyll and Bute, but what we could do, and this is referenced in the most recent strategy for the Health and Social Care Partnership, is the idea of developing more services that are built at a local level. Now, I talked about local care services, but it could mean more local provision, it could be more video type provision, it could mean not asking people on islands to travel for a day in advance for a 5-minute consultation in Glasgow. So, building greater capacity to do things at a much more local level. And that will also possibly result in more high-quality jobs remaining in Argyll and Bute. Lots of things follow through from this sort of weaving together of the democracy agenda, the restructure of local government, the restructure of our NHS services, the principles around prevention. All of those things imply much more spend, as they call it, upstream in communities rather than when things in need becomes much more serious and people have to go to those specialised, centralised hospitals. And that means thinking again about what we really want, what does a good life mean in Argyll and Bute? Ishabel talked about the importance of thinking about who we are as Argyll and Bute. You know, we are an

immensely unique and rural area, and I think that means empowering our local communities. So, in 10 years' time, obviously, come back to me again then, John, and we can see if we've managed collectively to deliver all of this. But I do envision a scenario where we are spending a lot more locally but doing that in a way that doesn't mean we lose the economies of scale, it's really, really challenging. It means that we have to be involved, all of us, in reinvigorated conversations with all of our communities.

John McLuckie 24:20

Fascinating stuff and I certainly will come back to you in ten years, but I think this podcast will likely be part one of a multiple part conversation as Community Wealth Building develops over the next few months and years. So, just to say thanks very much, Takki, thanks very much, Ishabel, for joining me in this episode of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Podcast.

Takki Sulaiman 24:42

Thanks, John.

Ishabel Bremner 24:44

Thank you, John. Nice to speak to you.