Topic Paper 19: Rural Development and Tourism

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

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) Section 15(5):

- *The principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district.*
- *the principal purposes for which the land is used.*
- *the extent to which there are rural areas within the district in relation to which there has been a substantial decline in population.*

NPF4 requirements for LDP:

NPF4 Policy 29: Rural Development

LDPs should identify the characteristics of rural areas within the plan area, including the existing pattern of development, pressures, environmental assets, community priorities and economic needs of each area. The spatial strategy should set out an appropriate approach to development in rural areas which reflects the identified characteristics. The Scottish Government's 6 Fold Urban Rural Classification 2020 should be used to identify remote rural areas. Spatial strategies should support the sustainability and prosperity of rural communities and economies. Previously inhabited areas which are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the spatial strategy.

NPF4 Policy 30: Tourism

LDPs should support the recovery, growth and long-term resilience of the tourism sector. The spatial strategy should identify suitable locations which reflect opportunities for tourism development by taking full account of the needs of communities, visitors, the industry and the environment. Relevant national and local sector driven strategies should also be taken into account.

The spatial strategy should also identify areas of pressure where existing tourism provision is having adverse impacts on the environment or the quality of life and health and wellbeing of local communities, and where further development is not appropriate

Links to Evidence:

National Reports and Guidance

- National Planning Framework 4 (Scottish Government 2023)
- Chief Planner letter (30th April 2025)
- Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation - gov.scot
- Programme for Government 2026-2031
- Scotland Outlook 2030 - Scotland's tourism strategy
- British Marine – Giant Opportunities 2026-2030
- Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund – Visit Scotland

Regional Reports and Guidance

- Regional Economic Strategy 2025 -2035

Local Reports and Guidance

- Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan 2 (2024)
- Argyll and Bute Council Economic Strategy 2024-2034
- Argyll and Bute Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2024-2034

- Argyll and Bute Council – Increased Campervan and Motorhome Tourism (2021)
- Argyll & The Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership - Strategy 2025-2028
- Argyll & The Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership – Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth Strategy 2022-2025
- Argyll and Bute Council – Housing Emergency: Public Consultation on Proposed Short Term Let Control Area (June 2026)

Datasets

- Scottish Towns Partnership – Understanding Scottish Places
- Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification
- Argyll and Bute STEAM data (2025) (Internal database held by Argyll and Bute Council Economic Development team)
- NRS Council Area Profile – Argyll and Bute
- Visit Scotland – Argyll & The Isles Statistics
- Visit Scotland – Travel Trends for Scotland

Summary of Evidence

Introduction

Argyll and Bute is the second largest local authority by area in Scotland, after Highland, and covers almost 9% of the total Scottish land area (Census 2022). Of this, approximately 99% is classed as countryside / rural (see detailed breakdowns with the Rural Development section).

Visit Scotland cite "the scenery and landscape" as being the primary reason for tourism in Scotland (*source*: Why People Choose Scotland I VisitScotland.org). On the basis of the rural nature of Argyll being a key draw for tourism, and the pressures for camping and caravan sites, huts, pods and other tourism accommodation being located in rural areas, it is appropriate to combine Rural Development and Tourism into one Topic Paper.

Tourism contributes significantly to Argyll and Bute's economy and is therefore also considered in the Economy, Culture, Creativity and Community Wealth Building Paper (Topic Paper 14). Other Topic Papers which have a particular level of interlinkage with this paper are:

- Topic Paper 2: Biodiversity, Woodland and Forestry, and Soils
- Topic Paper 3: Landscape
- Topic Paper 4: Historic Assets
- Topic Paper 7: Transport
- Topic Paper 8: Local Living, Design, Quality and Place
- Topic Paper 9: Housing

The following paper will set out the key evidence and policy documents relating to both Rural Development and Tourism before covering each individual topic in further detail.

National Policy Context

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

Rural revitalisation is one of six overarching spatial principles set out in NPF4. The aim is to encourage sustainable development in rural areas, recognising the need to grow and support urban and rural communities together.

NPF4 Policy 29 (Rural Development) requires LDP's to identify the characteristics of rural areas within the plan area, including the existing pattern of development, pressures, environmental assets, community priorities and economic needs of each area. The spatial strategy should set out an appropriate approach to development in rural areas which reflects the identified characteristics. The Scottish Government's 6 fold Urban Rural Classification 2020 should be used to identify remote rural areas. Spatial strategies should support the sustainability and prosperity of rural communities and economies. Previously inhabited areas which are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the spatial strategy

The policy intent is to encourage rural economic activity, innovation and diversification whilst ensuring that the distinctive character of the rural area and the service function of small towns, natural assets and cultural heritage are safeguarded and enhanced.

The expected outcomes are that rural places are vibrant and sustainable and rural communities and businesses are supported, and to have a balanced and sustainable rural population.

This policy links to the Design, Quality and Place, and Local Living Topic Paper 08 which includes an Appendix looking at the patterns of development across the planning authority area, most of which is rural and can inform the spatial strategy in this regard. There is also a link to Topic Paper 2: Biodiversity and Topic Paper 3: Landscape, which set out the environmental assets/designations across the planning authority area.

NPF4 Policy 30 (Tourism) requires LDP's to support the recovery, growth and long-term resilience of the tourism sector. The spatial strategy should identify suitable locations which reflect opportunities for tourism development by taking full account of the needs of communities, visitors, the industry and the environment. Relevant national and local sector driven tourism strategies should also be taken into account. The spatial strategy should also identify areas of pressure where existing tourism provision is having adverse impacts on the environment or the quality of life and health and wellbeing of local communities, and where further development is not appropriate.

The policy intent is to encourage, promote and facilitate sustainable tourism development which benefits local people, is consistent with our net zero and nature commitments, and inspires people to visit Scotland.

The expected outcomes are that communities and places enjoy economic, social and cultural benefits from tourism, supporting resilience and stimulating job creation.

Chief Planner Letter, 30th April 2025

The Chief Planner's letter of 30th April 2025 states:

"*Reinforcing the content of previous letters, policies 17 and 29 on rural homes and rural development are supportive policies that encourage sustainable development in rural areas. This positive position is embedded across NPF4, with 'rural revitalisation' being one of six spatial principles, spatial strategies identifying a wide range of opportunities across rural areas, and several national developments expected to be located in rural areas. We want to be clear that NPF4 is not intended to reduce flexibility of supportive local rural policies, but that NPF4 and the wider development plan should be read and applied as a whole, and work alongside all relevant policies and considerations to achieve the intention of encouraging, promoting and facilitating delivery of appropriate new homes and economic development. Guidance on local living recognises the*

importance of diversity and specific local conditions in rural areas, noting needs are likely to differ to more densely populated areas and therefore requiring flexible solutions, such as a network approach, and realistic consideration of accessibility by different modes of transport in the travel hierarchy."

The Scottish Government Chief Planner Letter for April 2025 reinforces the Scottish Governments position that NPF4 promotes and supports sustainable rural growth, with rural revitalisation identified as a key component of NPF4's spatial strategy, encouraging the growth of housing, employment and investment opportunities in rural and remote rural areas. However, the letter also acknowledges that NPF4 is not intended to reduce flexibility of supportive local policies, understanding that place-based approaches may differ across Scotland to reflect the characteristics and needs of rural communities, between local authorities.

Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation 2023

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 strategy recognises that tourism, including creative industries and events, as a sector that builds on Scotland's cultural assets and international reputation, with Argyll and Bute contributing towards this through hosting international events, and having a strong cultural heritage. Tourism plays an important role in the national economy, though the strategy outlines that the Covid-19 pandemic affected the tourism, hospitality and culture sectors due to restrictions. with the strategy referencing Tourism: Scotland Outlook 20230 as the national strategy to guide tourism development.

The national economic strategy sets out that economic opportunities are distributed across Scotland's regions, cities, towns and rural and island communities, aiming to share economic prosperity and shift away from an urban-centric focus. Despite this, the strategy identifies the challenges facing rural and island communities, including a

failing labour supply, poorer access to infrastructure and housing challenges which restrict local businesses. A just transition in Scotland's economy is set out in the strategy, focusing on protecting jobs and diversifying the economy. This includes utilising the geography of rural and island communities to tackle the climate crises, restoring nature and investing in Scotland's natural capital and land-based economy. Argyll and Bute can contribute to these objectives, supporting the growth of the renewable sector, preserving and conserving our natural assets and supporting development that helps the local economy sustainably.

Programme for Government 2026 – 2031

The Programme for Government sets out the objectives that will deliver tangible benefits in the lives of Scotland's people and creating opportunities for all to succeed. The programme has a number of references to tourism, stating that the sector is a national economic strength. The government set out a number of initiatives to make the tourism sector more resilient and drive economic growth in rural communities, including Argyll and Bute. For example, the Rest and Be Thankful (A83) upgrades to improve connectivity between the central belt and Argyll and Bute is critical for economic growth, including the tourism sector.

Furthermore, the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund has potential to improve local services and infrastructure, to manage visitor pressure more sustainably, and reduce environmental impacts of tourism. This is particularly relevant to remote mainland areas and islands within Argyll and Bute, where tourism associated infrastructure can alleviate pressure on local issues, such as reducing car travel through improved public transport links contributing towards the housing crisis by promoting more suitable tourism accommodation.

Regional Context

Regional Economic Strategy 2025 -2035

Developed by Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership, a partnership of public, private, third sector and academic organisations to realise regional economic potential, the Regional Economic Strategy sets out the vision that:

The Highlands and Islands is a dynamic, connected, resilient and prosperous region with a balanced and growing population and a vibrant economy, embedding community wealth building, leading Scotland's transition to net zero, and enhancing our natural environment.

From a rural development standpoint, two goals seek to revitalise our rural communities and create resilient places. These include delivering high-quality, affordable housing for residents and to enhance digital and transport infrastructure to become an exemplar of efficient rural connectivity.

Sustainable tourism is referenced as a key opportunity that could benefit the region, having the potential to support vibrant rural areas, creating local employment opportunities in rural communities. However, the strategy recognises that success will depend on balanced, sustainable growth of the visitor economy that need to protect and enhance the environment on which tourism depends.

Argyll and Bute Council Economic Strategy

Argyll and Bute's refreshed economic strategy, adopted in 2024, sets out to create a place-based, and people centred economy, delivering shared prosperity across the local authority area.
The strategy makes reference to Argyll and Bute's unique geography, and rich, natural landscape, however, recognises that our complex geography has contributed to

creating vast disparities across the area, particularly in terms of access to essential services, employment opportunities, and economic outcomes. The areas affected by these challenges are notably between Argyll and Bute's main population centres, especially remote-rural and island communities due to isolated nature of the area, and reliance on ferries.

In terms of tourism, the strategy states that tourism is a vital sector in Argyll and Bute, contributing significantly to the local economy. Statistics within the report state that tourism directly contributed to over £400m, welcoming over 2.4 million visitors to the area (2022). Tourism is also a key employer, with the strategy stating that tourism is forecast to be the largest employment grower with an expected 3300 (people) increase across all economic sectors by 2026. The sector's successful bounce back post-pandemic has contributed to this, becoming a sector that is reaching its former growth ambitions. Despite its success, the economic strategy does recognise that the sector does face challenges, linked to the cost-of-living crisis, infrastructure deficiencies and legislative changes. The overarching aim is to revitalise the tourism sector by addressing these industry challenges, most notably through transport infrastructure improvements, including active and sustainable travel.

The economic strategy identifies rural development and growth through 'PLACE', one of the strategy's four key strategic pillars. It encourages investment in our towns, rural and remote rural communities, including islands and peninsulas, to attract new people and businesses. It commits to pursuit of external funding opportunities, investment in critical infrastructure such as housing, land for business development, reuse of land or buildings for community benefit, as well as improvement of digital and transport connectivity, including roads, ports and ferries.

The Rural Growth Deal, agreed March 2025, recognises the ambition of the economic strategy, delivering approximately a £70m investment to develop our rural priorities. The key priorities are set out in Topic Paper 14: Economy, Culture, Creativity and Community Wealth Building, though do include housing and economic development projects, as well as aiming to generate over 70,000 additional visitors to Argyll and Bute per annum.

More information relating to Argyll and Bute's refreshed economic strategy can be found in Topic Paper 14: Economy, Culture, Creativity and Community Wealth Building.

Argyll and Bute Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (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, allowing residents to choose three key themes for the ABOIP to tackle. The themes identified are:

- Transport Infrastructure
- Housing
- Community Wellbeing

Transport Infrastructure and Housing are themes which are under increasing pressure from tourism growth but are also vital in supporting the visitor economy. Council analysis (2026) shows that 15% of all housing stock in Argyll and Bute is ineffective. This reduces the availability of properties to local residents and the working population, which can hinder employment opportunities in the area who rely on long-term housing availability. The ABOIP seeks to work in effective partnerships to ensure everyone living and working in Argyll and Bute has access to affordable homes of the right size, in the right place with access to services amenities and economic opportunities.

In addition, the tourism sector relies heavily on transport connectivity. The geography of the area means that tourism can account for significant demand on transport infrastructure, especially during peak season, when demand places immense pressure on local services. On the other hand, during off-peak seasons there may be insufficient demand to support these services.

Whilst no spatial priorities have been identified in the ABOIP, the overarching aim is to improve transport infrastructure by creating reliable, accessible and affordable public transport options, and creating a safe active travel and road network across Argyll and Bute. Transport Infrastructure is discussed in more detail in Topic Paper 7: Transport.

Rural Development

National Context

Scottish Towns Partnership – Understanding Scottish Places

Understanding Scottish Places is a tool developed by Scottish Towns Partnership, a national collective that represents and promotes the diversity of Scottish towns and places. The tool highlights shared characteristics, challenges and opportunities across towns, supporting better planning, management and policy decisions through consistent, comparative and well-evaluated data. The tool has data on 508 Scottish towns with a population of over 1000. The tool is split into three parts; a national town typology which places towns into similar types based on characteristics, an assessment of how towns inter-relate, and the 'Your Town Audit' which gathers local insights into each individual community. The STP considers towns with a population of greater than 500.

As such, 17 towns within Argyll and Bute are represented in the tool, these are: Ardrishaig, Campbeltown, Cardross, Dunoon, Garelochhead, Helensburgh, Innellan, Kilcreggan, Lochgilphead, Oban, Port Bannatyne, Rhu, Rosneath, Rothesay, Sandbank, Tarbert and Tobermory.

Each community contains data relating to population, local characteristics, industries within the area, and a score for each of 12 categories (relating to employment, public, commercial, and social opportunities in the area). They are also categorised in terms of their inter-relationship, a model framed by the Centre for Local Economic Strategy. Thereafter, each town is categorised into:

- Independent - high number of public; commercial; and social economy assets in relation to its population. This will include GP surgeries, shops and charities. It will have a diverse sector base in terms of jobs. Residents will travel short distances to work and study, and the town will attract people from neighbouring towns to access its assets.
- Interdependent - will sit somewhere between independent and dependent towns. For some public, commercial and social economy assets it may have a high number in relation to its population and for others a low number. A balance of people will work and study in the town with others reliant on neighbouring towns.
- Dependent - a low number of public; commercial; and social economy assets in relation to its population. It will be reliant on singular sectors in terms of jobs. Residents will travel longer distances to work and study and the town will be reliant on neighbouring towns for assets and jobs.

Most of the Argyll and Bute communities listed are described as interdependent or independent towns, though there are occasions where smaller settlements, such as Kilcreggan and Rosneath, are categorised as dependent, looking towards a neighbouring, larger settlement for access to services and employment.

The tool can be accessed here, where towns in Argyll and Bute can be compared against other towns within Scotland.

Local Context

Rural Development in Argyll and Bute

Argyll and Bute's unique geography makes it one of Scotland's most rural authorities. Rural development is set out as a key priority in both NPF4 and LDP2, with the need to support fragile, rural communities and economies with sustainable growth, specifically population growth and retention, and improving overall economic resilience.

Argyll and Bute's population predominantly lives in rural areas, both within the LDP2 designations and the Scottish Government's 6 Fold urban rural classification system, both of which are considered in detail later in this paper.

Census data and NRS records show that the depopulation is occurring, particularly those of working age. NRS stats show that in 2025 there has been a 0.5% decrease in population from 2024. This continues a trend of depopulation, where Argyll and Bute's population has declined over 4% from 2001 to 2025.

LDP2 seeks to support these rural communities and promote growth sustainability through flexible policies as referred to below. Monitoring was undertaken by the planning authority to identify trends and hotspots (where development that would contribute to rural revitalisation had been consented since the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023). Data collected runs to February 2026 and includes infrastructure upgrades, employment uses, and access to natural resources and the environment. These have been captured and are shown in figure 1. **Note**: Some applications have been captured that fall within the settlement boundaries of small towns and settlements. Whilst these are not within LDP2 countryside areas, they may promote rural growth through employment opportunities or infrastructure upgrades, for example, digital connectivity improvements. As these applications remain in the mapping, the lack of refined information relating to rural areas specifically remains an evidence gap.

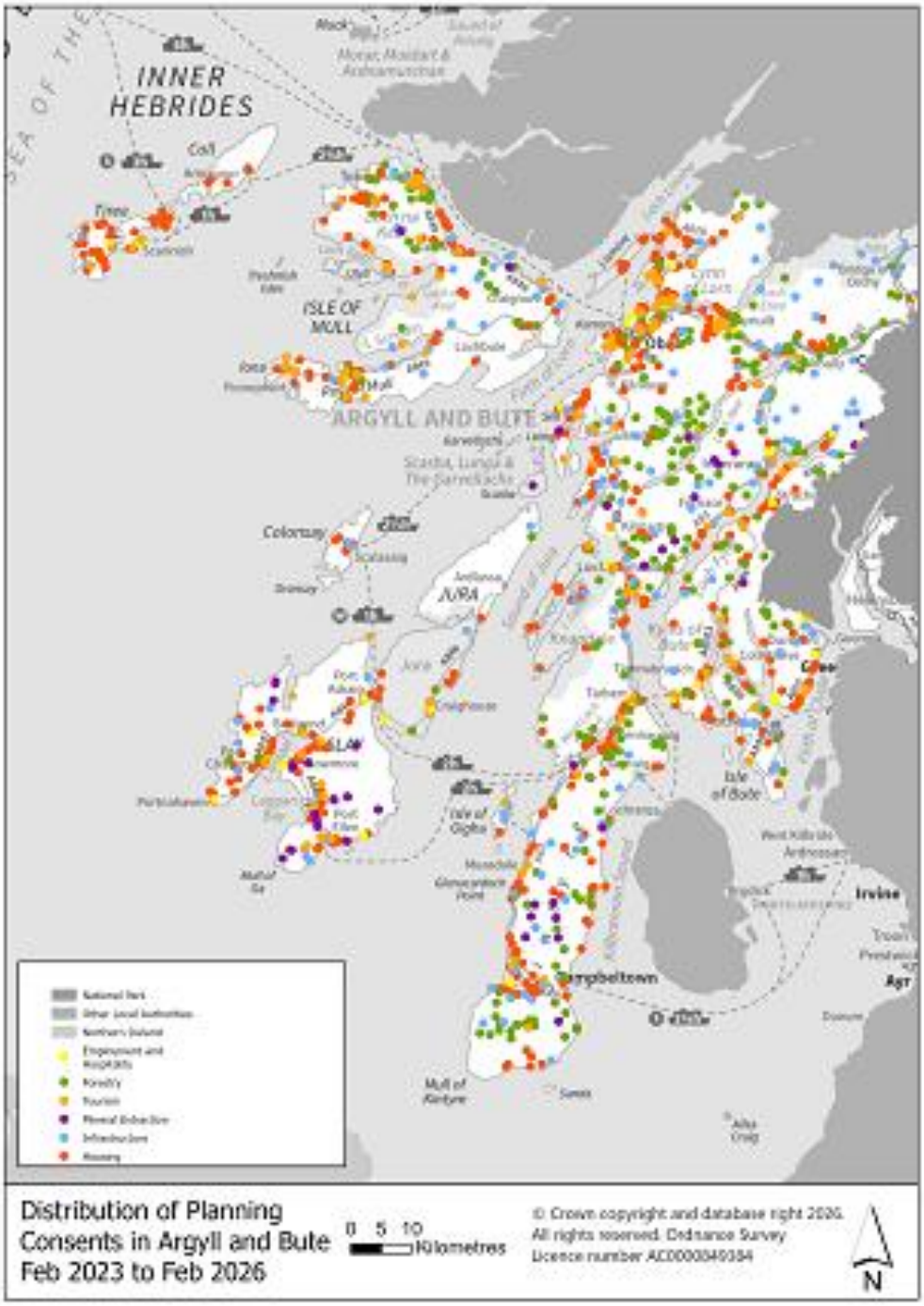


Figure 1: Consented planning applications in Argyll and Bute relating to rural development between Feb 2023 – Feb 2026

Hotspots of development in rural areas are prominent within sections of the isles, including Mull and Islay, though there are a significant number of applications in both Lorn, and Mid Argyll and Kintyre, especially in the areas around Campbeltown and between Lochgilphead and Oban. Despite this, from the research undertaken there are no trends or development patterns that are increasingly high or unsustainable.

Monitoring should continue throughout the rest of the plan period until the adoption of LDP3 to identify emerging trends if they occur.

This information has been broken down into Housing Market Areas to show more localised trends. An example of this can be found in figure 2, which identifies all approved planning applications relating to rural development since the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023 until February 2026.

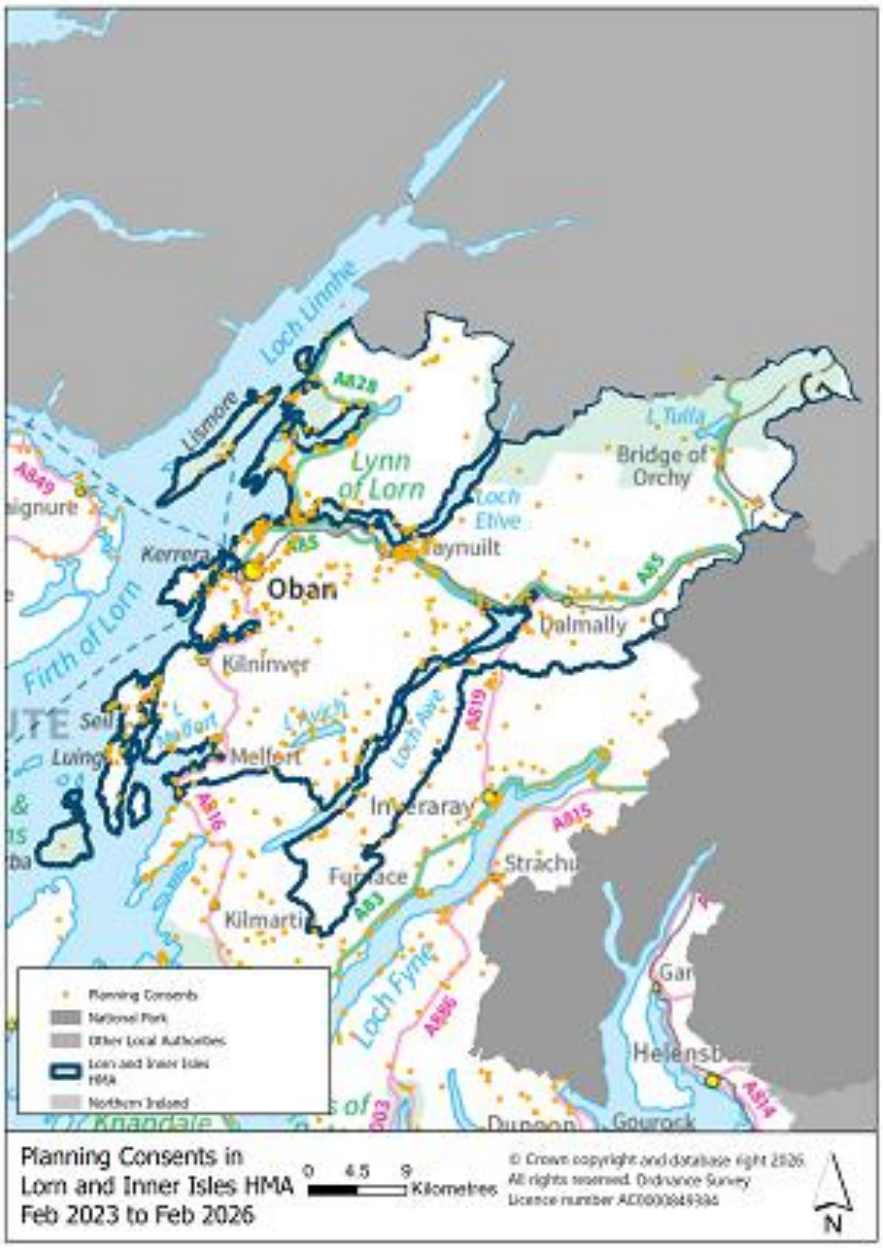


Figure 2: Consented planning applications in Lorn and the Inner Isles HMA relating to rural development between Feb 2023 – Feb 2026

Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan 2

Policy 02 of Argyll and Bute Council's second Local Development Plan (LDP2) covers development within countryside areas, remote countryside areas, and the Helensburgh and Lomond green belt.

Policy 02 takes a flexible approach to development with the Countryside Area but balances this with an onus on the applicant to demonstrate that there will be no unacceptable adverse effects (either individually or cumulatively) on natural heritage resources, built and/or cultural heritage resources, and landscape and visual amenity. In cases where a major development is proposed, or for any development where there is preliminary evidence that there may be such adverse effects (and where a formal EIA is not required), a landscape and visual impact assessment may be required. LVIA requirements for rural development, and particularly for that within a designated landscape area (Wild Land, NSA and LLA) are covered within Topic Paper 3: Landscape.

The policy requirements for Remote Countryside Areas are also contained within Policy 02 but are less flexible than that for Countryside Areas. Within these, only specific categories of developments on appropriate sites will generally be supported.

Policy 02 also includes requirements for proposals within the Helensburgh and Lomond Green Belt. This is considered in detail within Topic Paper 18: Green Belt.

The Scottish Government's 6 fold Urban / Rural Classification

The NPF4 refers to the 2020 classification, however this has been superseded by the 2022 update.

This classifies Scotland into areas as follows:

1. Large Urban Areas – Settlements of 125,000 people and over
2. Other Urban Areas – Settlements of 10,000 to 124,999 people

3. Accessible Small Towns – Settlements of 3,000 to 9,999 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
4. Remote Small Towns – Settlements of 3,000 to 9,999 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more
5. Accessible Rural Areas – Areas with a population of fewer than 3,000 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more
6. Remote Rural Areas – Areas with a population of fewer than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more

Within Argyll and Bute, the following percentages of the population are within each category. Note that this information, compiled by the Scottish Government, is for the council area, including the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, rather than the Argyll and Bute planning authority area.

Large Urban	Other Urban	Accessible Small Towns	Remote Small Towns	Accessible Rural	Remote Rural
0.0%	18.7%	2.0%	29.8%	7.7%	**41.8%**

Figure 3: Table showing percentage of population within each of the 6 Fold classifications for whole of Argyll and Bute (including LLTNP) (source: Scottish Government)

The area of the Scottish Government's 6 Fold Urban Rural GIS polygon for the Argyll and Bute planning authority area (i.e. excluding the area covered by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park), is 3.4% smaller than the area of the Argyll and Bute boundary, and DM Zones polygons. It is likely that this discrepancy is due to the Scottish Government excluding inland water / loch areas.

- 770 ha is classified as Other Urban Areas (0.12%)
- 211 ha is classified as Accessible Small Towns (0.03%)
- 1,570 ha is classified as Remote Small Towns (0.25%)

- 11,656 ha is classified as Accessible Rural Areas (1.83%)
- 621,636 ha is classified as Remote Rural Areas **(97.77%)**

Key points from this data:

- 41.8% of the population live in areas classed as Remote Rural
- 49.5% of the population live in rural areas (accessible rural + remote rural)
- 71.6% of the population live in remote areas (remote small towns + remote rural)
- 28.4% of the population live in accessible areas (other urban + accessible small towns + accessible rural)

Figure 4 shows the sixfold classification within the context of Argyll and Bute's planning authority.

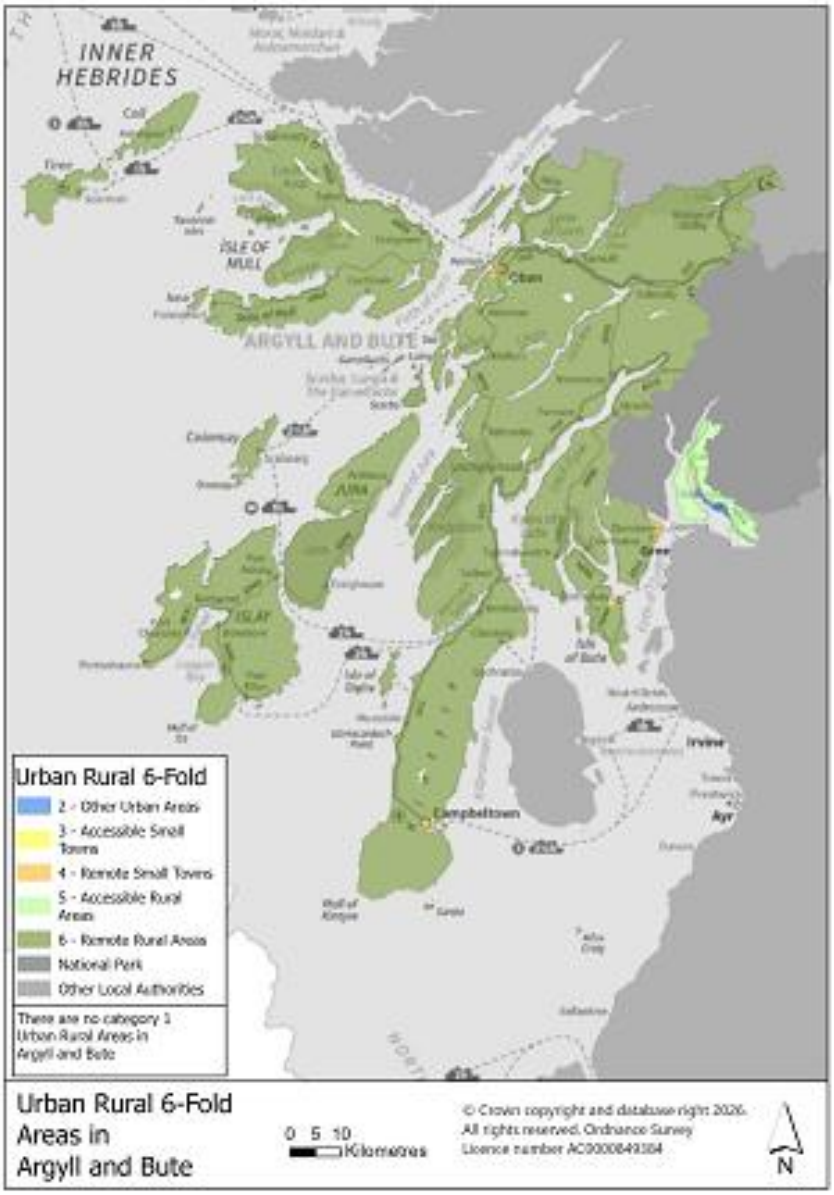


Figure 4: Urban Rural 6-fold classification areas in Argyll and Bute

Argyll and Bute's LDP2 has a different approach to urban/rural classification, using settlement boundaries as established 'urban' areas, a green belt area surrounding Helensburgh, countryside and remote countryside areas. These are designated within LDP2 as follows:

- 297,619 ha as Countryside Areas (45.20%)
- 351,207 ha is designated as Remote Countryside Areas (53.34%)

- 6,756 ha as Settlement Areas (1.03%)
- 2,882 ha as Green Belt (0.44%)

The total countryside area (countryside + remote countryside + Green Belt) is **98.97%.** This total is lower than the total rural land area established in the 6 fold classification which stands at **99.53%** (Accessible + Remote). However, this may be because the Scottish Government figure includes the LLTNP area within it.

Areas where there are overlaps between rural land between Argyll and Bute and the 6 fold urban rural classification include the western and eastern boundary of Helensburgh, sections of the settlement boundary in Rothesay, Bute, and to the north of Campbeltown. These areas are not exhaustive but do show that there are some differences between the definitions in LDP2 and NPF4.

Figure 5 shows an example of the LDP settlement/rural classification against the 6 fold classification in the context of Kintyre, including one of the discrepancies between rural definitions in Argyll and Bute Council's LDP2 and the Scottish Government's 6 fold urban rural classification around the periphery of Campbeltown.

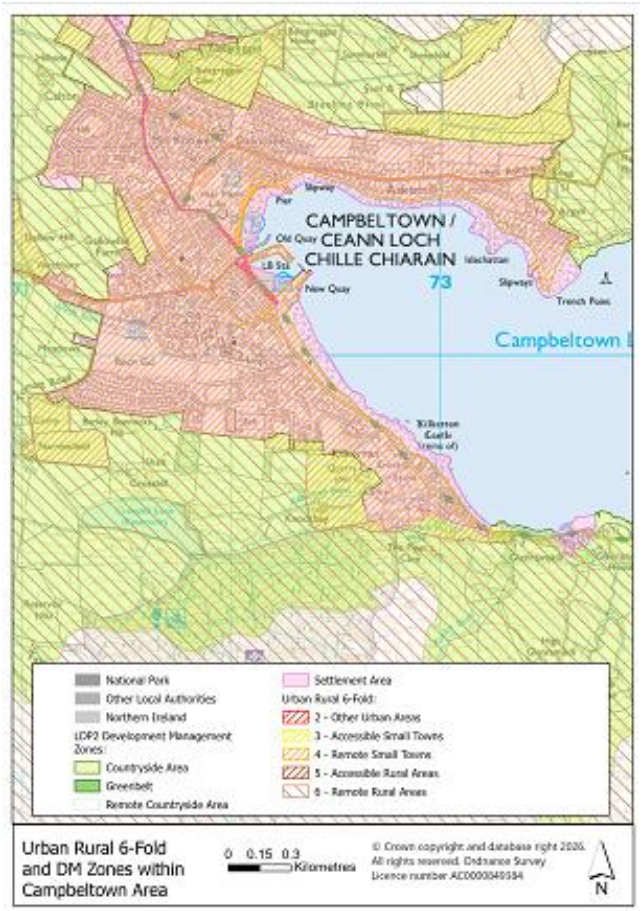


Figure 5: Urban Rural 6-fold classification and LDP2 DM Zones crossover within context of Campbeltown and Kintyre HMA

Whilst the population data is not directly comparable to the land area data (as the former includes the LLTNP and the latter does not), a rough comparison could still be taken which means that:

- Around half the population live in settlement areas accounting for around 1% of the land area
- Around half the population live across the rural areas accounting around 99% of the land area

Tourism

National Context

Scotland Outlook 2030

The Scotland Outlook 2030 sits as Scotland's national tourism strategy, setting out a long-term vision for Scottish to become a globally recognised destination that delivers sustainable economic growth while protecting Scotland's natural and cultural assets through tourism.

The strategy sets out 4 key priorities to realise this ambition:

- Our passionate people – investing in people and skills to help the industry
- Our thriving places – ensure tourism benefits local communities sustainably through managing growth
- Our diverse businesses – strengthening local tourism enterprises
- Our memorable experiences – deliver high-quality visitor experiences

The strategy states that future success will be achieved through partnership, leadership and acknowledgement of six conditions that will help realise the ambition and vision of the strategy. These are:

- Digital – harnessing the power of technology and data
- Policy – ensuring that the right policy and regulatory landscape are in place
- Investment – ensuring we have access to investment
- Connectivity – Proactively investing in the right transport and digital connectivity
- Business network – supporting network for our businesses
- Positioning – Successful positioning of Scotland for its tourism areas

The Scottish Government publishes a performance tracker to measure the goals and objectives of the strategy. The latest tracker update was published in March 2026.

Scottish Government Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF)

Launched by VisitScotland, the RTIF aims to alleviate the challenges posed by increased visitor numbers in fragile areas. Since its inception, Argyll and Bute Council has secured £1.98m from the fund for various projects relating to tourism infrastructure such as parking, visitor facilities, public toilets and signage. The fund works with the Argyll and Bute Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development (STID) Plan, initially developed by local groups and charities across nine islands.

Some of the approved projects, which will enhance tourism facilities, include:

- **Fionnphort Car Park Improvements** – upgrade to motorhome and disabled parking bays.
- **Bruichladdich – Port Charlotte pathway** – a dedicated, all accessible, pedestrianised route linking accommodation and tourism businesses between Port Charlotte and Bruichladdich businesses and distillery.
- **Ulva Ferry shore development** – upgrading of facilities at the Ulva Ferry on Mull including additional parking bays, electric hookups and motorhome hard standings.
- **Gigha Camp and Motorhome** site - provision of motorhome and camping facilities at Gigha ferry terminal, including toilets, showers and waste disposal facilities for visitors.
- **Port Ellen Playing Fields Motorhome Facilities** – increased bays to cater for demand on the island and new toilets, showers, and recycling facilities on site.
- **Staffa Conservation and Infrastructure Development** – improve visitor infrastructure on the island to reduce overcrowding and improve visitor experience. Project includes development of larger boat jetty, with increased seating capacity, a dedicated waiting area and improve visitor flow to the island.
- **Glen Lochy and Glen Orchy Visitor Facilities Improvements** – Three car parking developments in the area to manage motorhome parking and car oversubscription. Project also includes waste facilities and a dedicated 2.5km path improvements linking the car parks to the surrounding area.

- **Bute Forest**: Development of a new arrival point, car park, and additional amenities for the forest, managed by Bute Community Land Company—the largest community land buy-out in Scotland.
- **Hynish Trust (Tiree)**: Expansion of parking, site organization, and improved signage at the 19th-century Hynish Lighthouse Shore Station. Following its transfer to the Tiree community in 2024, the Hynish Trust now leads the project.
- **RSPB Loch Gruinart Nature Reserve (Islay)**: Expansion of parking, along with new toilet facilities and an arrival point for this popular wildlife reserve.

The STID Plan, supported by VisitScotland, provides up to £35,000 per proposal to prepare projects for full RTIF funding. Awards for larger-scale initiatives (2025–27) range from £150,000 to £900,000.
Visit Scotland's website provides details on all schemes funded by the RTIF.

Visit Scotland Scottish Tourism Statistics and Research

As part of research and insights, VisitScotland detail information on tourism statistics within Scotland's regions, including Argyll and Bute. These provide an overview of key tourism figures in the area, which are also referenced in Topic Paper 14: Economy, Culture, Creativity and Community Wealth Building.

There were 490,000 overnight visitors by both internal and domestic visitors between 2022-2024, contributing to 2.03 million nights spent in accommodation. Argyll and Bute welcomes predominantly domestic visitors, accounting for 1.48 million of the nights spent in Argyll and Bute. 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.

VisitScotland also refer to the Scottish Growth Statistics, last published in December 2025, that states that tourism contributed to 6000 employment opportunities in 2024, a

16.7% share of the total employment within Argyll and Bute. As of 2025, there were 600 registered businesses relating to tourism, accounting for 15.5% of the total business numbers in the region.

The numbers indicate that the tourism is a healthy sector in Argyll and Bute, contributing to high employment levels and turnover within the region.

Visit Scotland also produce travel trends for Scotland which reflect existing visitor behaviours, shifting interests and attitudes of tourists over time. 2026 was described as being "the transformation economy" with visitors seeking meaningful, intentional experiences that foster personal development, social impact and sustainability. The trends identified by Visit Scotland are listed below:

- *Give and break* – sustainability beyond 'green', including supporting local communities and economies
- *Athleisure* – increasingly popularity of social fitness events, with participants travelling to join in.
- *Augment your experience* – improving interactivity in attractions to create a sense of fun during the visitor journey and increase engagement.
- *BYOB: Bring your own budget* – budget flexibility is becoming increasingly important. Flexibility in pricing packages, including tiers, allows visitors to pick options suited to their budgets.
- *Adventure luxe* – traditional relaxing and comfortable holidays are expanding into enriching outdoor activities, providing thrill seeking experiences.
- *Holiday helpers* – with the cost of living crisis, visitors are more dependent on other family members. Grandparents taking grandchildren on holiday is one example of this growing trend.
- *Scran seekers* – the food scene has become increasingly popular since the rise of content creators on social media. Food experiences go beyond eating a meal and include sampling all aspects of local cuisine.
- *Enduring trend: water wellness* – continuing from 2025, visitors are keen to enjoy therapeutic outdoor experiences, such as hot/cold hydrotherapy.

- *Enduring trend: set-jetting plus* – visitors are continuing to visit attractions associated with their favourite film and TV locations.

Local Context

Tourism in Argyll and Bute

Performing better than pre-pandemic levels, tourism is an important aspect of the local economy. Argyll and Bute attracts visitors through its natural environment, considered to be one of the greatest attractions of the area for both domestic and international visitors. The Argyll & The Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership note that Argyll and Bute offers visitors a chance to connect with the outdoors, which is backed up by VisitScotland's research which states that outdoor, nature tourism is one of the standout reasons for why people visit this area. However, due to the rural nature of the area, tourism can place a strain on essential services.

There has been a change in the way people access and stay within Argyll and Bute, with the Council publishing a paper post-pandemic noting the sharp increase in camping and motorhome holidays, again placing pressure on fragile infrastructure and the environment. Therefore, it is imperative that, whilst it is recognised that this sector plays an important role in the local economy, that growth is managed sustainably ensuring that the sector has minimal effects on infrastructure and the outstanding natural environment, one of the key reasons why tourists visit the area in the first place.

Argyll & The Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership – Economy Growth Strategy 2025-2028

Developed in partnership by HIE, Visit Scotland, Argyll and Bute Council, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and Wild About Argyll and the Isles, this strategy devises priorities to grow the tourism and visitor sector for the long-term benefit of communities. Argyll & the Isles have the opportunity to take advantage of natural assets, culture and heritage, providing a combination of experiences that encourages

visitors to stay longer, explore further and return. Similar to the previous strategy (2022-2025), the refreshed strategy works hand in hand with Scotland Outlook 2030 to promote:

- Responsible Tourism
- Sustainable Tourism
- Fair Work

To do this, four key priorities were established to sustainably grow the visitor sector and experience. These are detailed below:

- Sector & Market Focus
- Data-based destination marketing
- Product and destination development
- Industry recruitment and skills development

The priorities from the previous strategy remain relevant, and include:

- *Extending the season and spreading visitors across the destination*
- *Reaching new audiences*
- *Improving the offer*
- *The journey towards net zero*

Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan 2

LDP2 recognises that tourism makes an important contribution to the Argyll and Bute economy, with every part of Argyll and Bute having potential to benefit from the growth of the tourism sector, includes Tourism Development Opportunities. These areas have been identified as having positive potential to deliver sustainable tourist development that could actively contribute towards the growth of the tourism sector in Argyll and Bute in accordance with the spatial strategy. These are:

- Tobermory, Mull for a tourism destination and nature/forestry tourism experience

- Tioran Forest, Mull for a forest experience, cycle trails and a visitor centre
- Ballygowan Farm, Kilmore for small scale tourist accommodation, cycle facilities, redevelopment and infill opportunities at existing steadings
- Islay as a tourist destination for eco-tourism and distilleries as well as small scale craft and retail opportunities with a community garden at Islay House Farm, Bridgend
- Inveraray as a tourist destination with redevelopment opportunities at the former brickworks site
- Kilmartin Glen offers opportunities for tourism within its historic environment
- The Crinan Canal between Lochgilphead and Ardrishaig for tourism and recreation
- Tarbert as a tourist destination
- Portavadie as a tourist/leisure/recreation destination
- North Bute Community Forest
- Rothesay for the sea front, conservation area and Mount Stuart
- Dunoon for the sea front, access to LLTNP, and the conservation area
- Helensburgh for Hill House and the conservation areas, the reservoirs, sea front, John Muir Way, and access to LLTNP
- Campbeltown and Machrihanish to develop links to Ardrossan and Northern Ireland, as well as recognition of opportunities from the Kintyre Way, distilleries and golf
-

A map from LDP2 has been included in figure 6. These show some of the key tourism assets as well as the tourism development opportunities listed above.

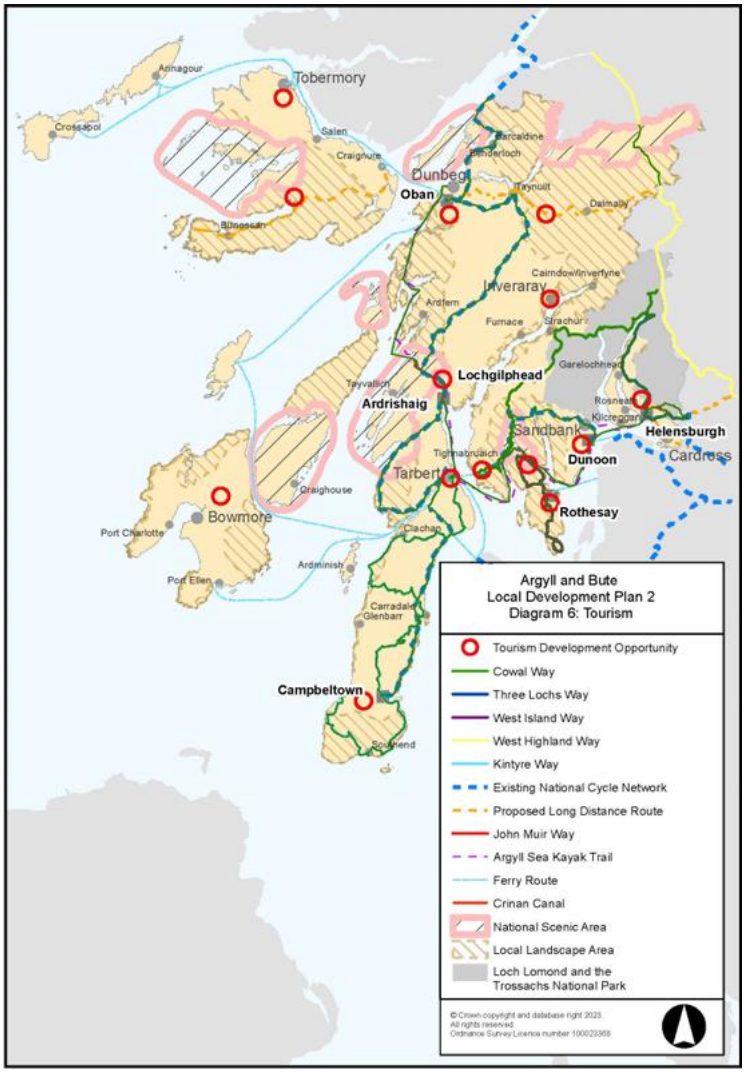


Figure 6: LDP2 extract showing tourism assets and opportunities in Argyll and Bute

Tourism is covered within Policies 23 to 27:

- Policy 23 sets out a presumption in favour of new or improved tourist facilities giving consideration to its integration with the landscape or townscape settlement pattern (unless locational operational need demonstrated), character and amenity; accessibility by sustainable travel options. The policy does not support tourism uses in the Green Belt unless it is a farm diversification scheme, or woodland related activities or outdoor recreational uses. This strict requirement, which differs from the more flexible criteria of the NPF4, is discussed within the Green Belt Topic Paper (18).

- Policy 24 protects existing tourism uses, only allowing change of use to non-tourism uses if the business is no longer viable and has been actively marketed.

- Policy 25 gives support to the Tourism Development Opportunities listed above.

- Policy 26 gives support to informal public outdoor recreation and leisure related development where they address an identifiable shortfall or make a positive contribution to the tourism network and visitor experience as well as requiring to be integrated into the landscape and have no adverse environmental, access, or servicing impacts.

- Policy 27 requires that proposals for huts and hutting developments will only be permitted where they are low impact in terms of design, construction, siting and access arrangements, of non-permanent construction and capable of being removed from site without a trace; off grid; and that arrangements for waste are made.

STEAM Data

STEAM is a comprehensive tool used to measure the economic impact of tourism within Argyll and Bute (including the National Park Planning Authority area). It allows the Council to identify and monitor trends within the area, and areas of particular growth or that require support. Data included within the system ranges from overall economic impact, including visitor expenditure, to monitoring staying and day visitors. Below are statistics from the data that set out the performance of the tourism sector.

Tourism in 2025 brought a total of £886.26m to the local economy, a 14.9% increase on 2024's figure of £771.15m. The sector has seen at least a 12% increase year on year since the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020, and an overall increase of 131% since recording began in 2014, as shown in Figure 7.

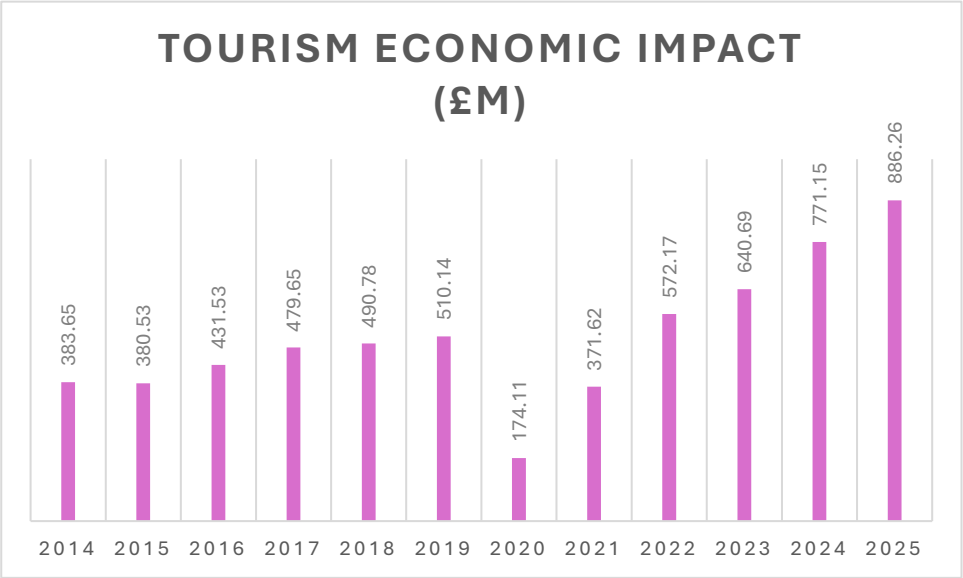


Figure 7: Tourism total economic impact (£m) (STEAM, 2026)

This figure was spent by 3.46 million tourists who visited Argyll and Bute in 2025, a small increase of 4.5% on the figure for the previous year (3.31 million). These figures are higher than those of pre-pandemic levels, with 2019 recording 2.88 million visitors, over half a million less than current levels. Each year has seen an increase in visitor numbers, a trend that indicates the strength of the tourism economy. Figure 8 shows the number of visitors per annum in Argyll and Bute from 2014-2025.

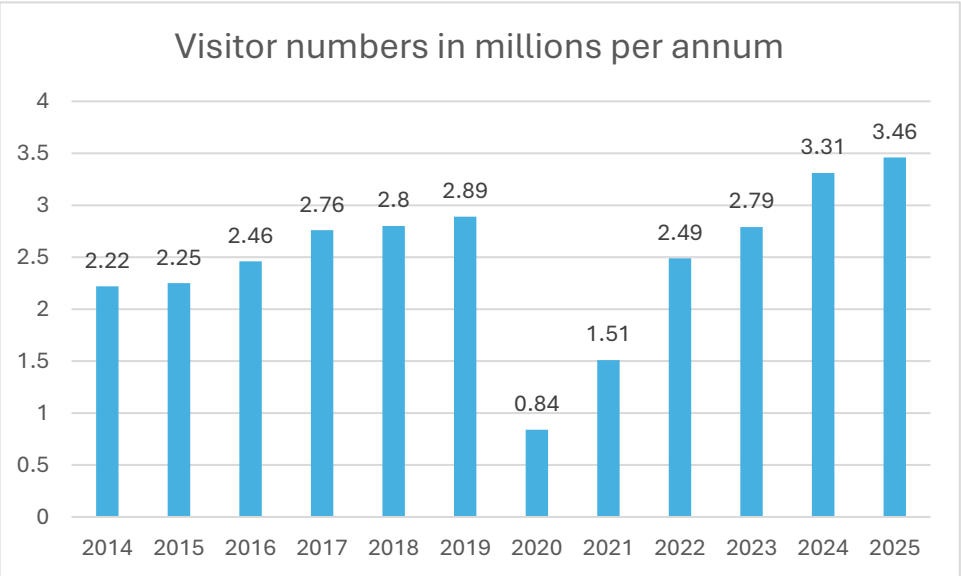


Figure 8: Visitor numbers per annum in Argyll and Bute (STEAM, 2026)

The rise of non-serviced accommodation and the decreasing number of hotels is evident within the data. The STEAM application shows that in 2025 there were 311 established serviced accommodations, with 15 of the total serviced accommodation properties identified as having over 50 rooms. This was a decrease from 2024 of 81, where the figure was at 392. However, when looking at the trends since 2014, there has been a sharp decline in serviced accommodation, with 229 less than there were in 2014, amounting to a total of 2328 fewer beds within serviced accommodation across Argyll and Bute. Conversely, the non-serviced accommodation sector is growing, with 2346 premises registered according to statistics in 2025, an increase of 808 from 2024, and 1710 since 2014. These numbers combined show 2657 accommodation options across Argyll and Bute with non-serviced accommodation holding 88% of the share of the total number, as displayed in figure 9.

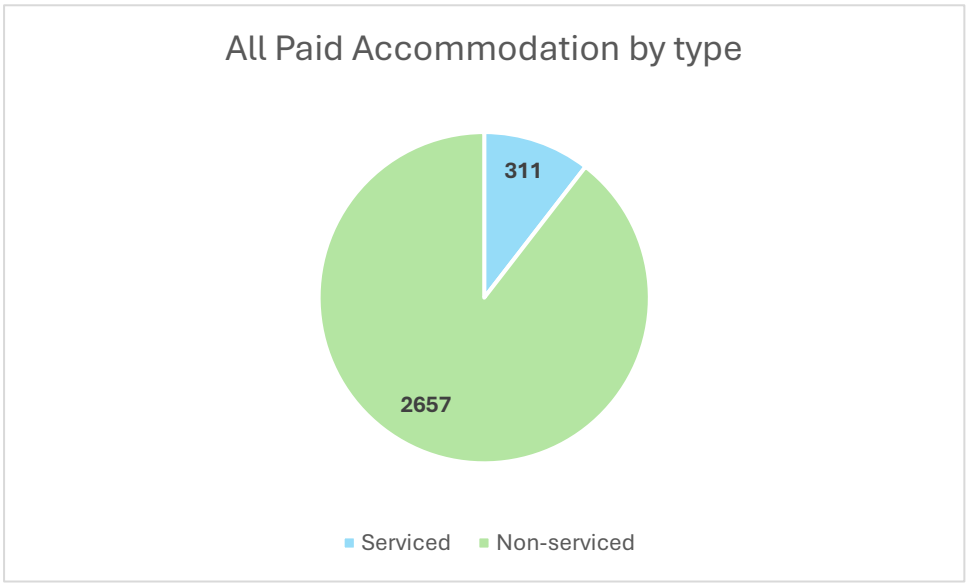


Figure 9: Number of paid accommodations by type (STEAM, 2026)

Lastly, the tourism industry is involved in both direct employment opportunities, through serviced accommodation, and indirect, through sectors linked to tourism, including but not limited to, hospitality, retail and transportation. With an increased national working age, and decreasing population in Argyll and Bute, the Council and Planning Authority require to continue to support sectors that promote employment opportunities in Argyll and Bute, but this requires consideration of a balance of factors including consideration of the overall housing market and wider economy. Stats from

STEAM show that tourism contributed to full-time employment (FTE) for 12,020 people. This equates to just over 1 in 5 of the working age population in Argyll and Bute, which is approximately 52,000. The FTE figure is an increase of 10% on 2024, for which the figure was 10,925, and over 2500 more than the highest figure pre-pandemic which stood at 9495 in 2019. Figure 10 details the total FTE in Argyll and Bute over the period between 2014-2025.

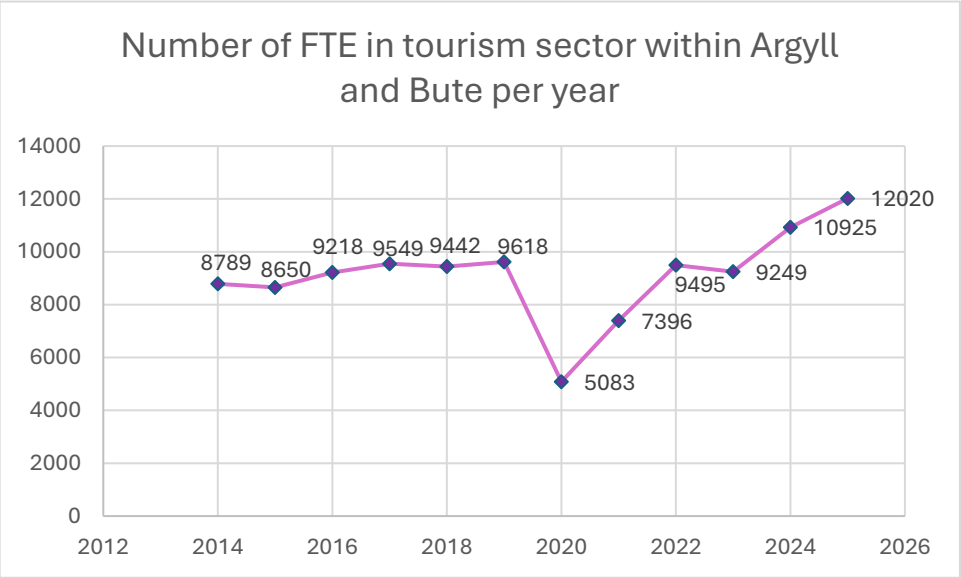


Figure 10: Number of Full Time Employees employed in tourism sector within Argyll and Bute 2014 – 2025 (STEAM, 2026)

The figures here are not exhaustive of all data on the tourism sector that STEAM has collected, however, provide evidence that tourism is a healthy and extremely important sector contributing to the economy of Argyll and Bute, with numbers having increased year-on-year, currently sitting significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. The stats do indicate that as a result of visitor numbers, there is an increased likelihood of pressure on essential services, including transport, housing and infrastructure. Therefore, LDP3 should look to support tourism, but do so sustainably, to minimise pressure on these essential services, particularly those in rural locations.

Marine Tourism

Argyll and Bute's vast and varied coastline attracts domestic and international visitors to the area and is seen as playing an important role within the tourism sector of Argyll

and Bute. Giant Opportunities 2026 – 2030 sets out the strategic framework for Scotland's marine tourism sector. It aims to increase the sectors GVA from £699 million in 2023 to around £800 million by 2030. Marine tourism employs around 34,600 jobs across Scotland, making it the largest employer within the wider marine sector. The plan sets out four key priorities:

- Increasing the value and visibility of marine tourism
- Addressing skills shortages
- Strengthening community and placemaking outcomes
- Delivering net zero and environmental ambitions

Marine tourism is recognised as contributing towards destination development within Scotland, such as within the growth deal for Argyll and Bute. The plan states that public investment can promote the sector using a place-based approach that aligns closely with the opportunities and challenges of coastal communities.

Tourism Pressure

Tourism plays an extremely important role in Argyll and Bute's rural economy, as the STEAM data above shows. However, with this comes an increased pressure on other essential sectors such as infrastructure and public transport. Since the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023, over 280 planning applications for tourism, accommodation have been approved across the planning authority area. Further approved applications may relate to tourism in some ways, however, have not been captured in this data as they primarily relate to another sector. For example, a farm shop, which is likely to attract seasonal visitors, is primarily a retail use.

The granted applications and associated hotspots allow the planning authority to understand areas of pressures. Shown spatially in figure 11, Lorn, the Islands, and Helensburgh and Lomond all show areas of tourism pressure, though this is likely down to the larger population density in comparison to other areas within Argyll and Bute. The

isles, including Islay, Mull and Tiree are experiencing high volumes of tourism developments and may struggle to cope with future demand due to smaller populations and more remote, fragile communities.

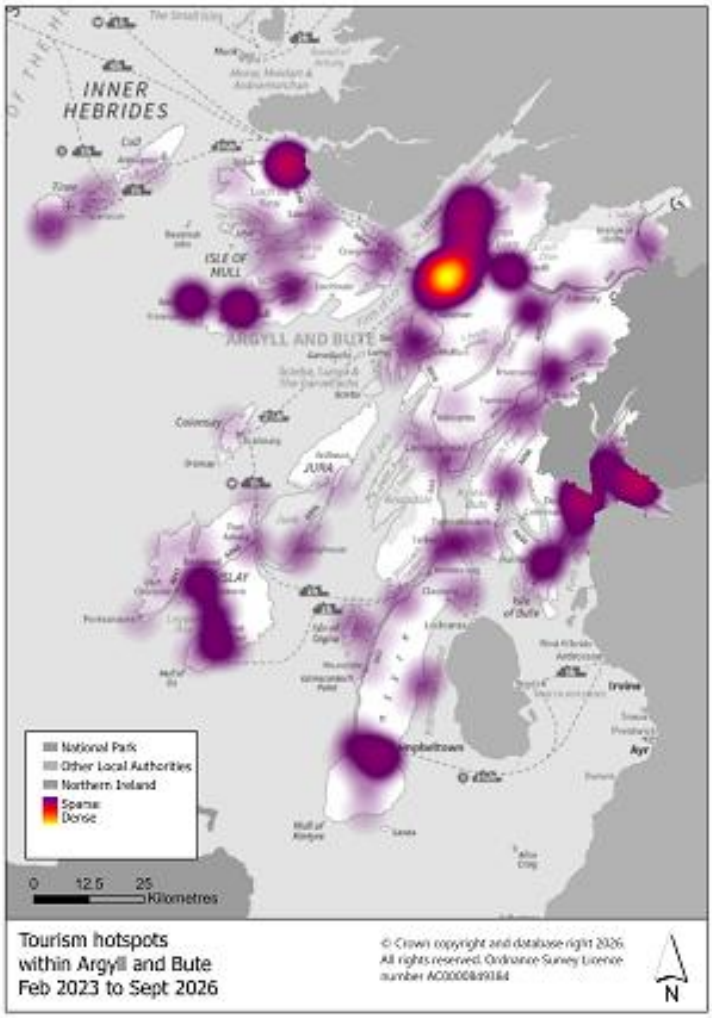


Figure 11: Tourism hotspots within Argyll and Bute

Short Term Lets

Short Term Lets (STLs) are a form of non-serviced and self-catered accommodation which have become increasingly more popular, particularly over the last decade, due to the rise of digital platforms. STLs can cover a range of types of accommodation including home sharing, secondary letting where the renters are the sole occupiers of the property through the duration of their say, and holiday chalets and glamping pods.

The Council declared a Housing Emergency in 2023 with one of the key issues driving this being the significant levels of housing stock not being used by people to live in as their principal place of residence. National Planning Framework 4 aims to support development that helps retain and increase the population of rural areas. Policy 30 of NPF4 does not support, in principle, the reuse of existing residential accommodation for short term holiday accommodation where any loss is not outweighed by demonstratable local economic benefits. The current policy position allows the planning authority to refuse applications for a change of use should the local economic benefits not outweigh the loss of residential accommodation.

Argyll and Bute Council published a paper in June 2026 providing context on short term lets. Research shows that this un-used housing stock (ineffective stock) made up of short-term rental accommodation, as well as long term empty properties and second or holiday homes, account for around 15% of the overall housing stock across Argyll and Bute, including the National Park area. However, these properties are not shared equally across the area, with some Housing Market Areas having as much as 38% of housing stock described as ineffective, including holiday rentals. Figure 12 provides a breakdown of the entire housing market share, including all of the categories mentioned above. Coll and Tiree has the highest percentage of ineffective housing stock, at approximately 38%.

Housing Market Area	TOTAL No. of dwellings on Council Tax as of April 2025 Plus STLs not on Council Tax Register (NDR)	Secondary Let STLs		Long Term Empty (incl levy but excl Empty & Exempt) As of April 2025		Second Homes (%) As of April 2025 that are not also STLs		Ineffective stock (Columns 3,4 & 5 added together)		Pressure Ratio Overall Housing Need and Demand As of April 2025	Sales out with ABC (%) As at 2024 (based on 11months sales)	Private Rented (%) As at April 2025	Council Tax Single Occupancy discount (%) As of April 2025
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%				
Mull & Iona	2,328	382	16.4%	149	6.4%	159	6.8%	690	29.6%	9:1	55%	10.4%	29.5%
Coll & Tiree	783	96	12.3%	41	5.2%	167	21.3 %	304	38.8%	4:1	67%	4.6%	24.7%
Islay / Jura & Colonsay	2,543	289	11.4%	189	7.4%	233	9.2%	711	28%	4:1	48%	9%	30.5%
Lorn and the Inner Isles	9,581	663	6.9%	364	3.8%	344	3.6%	1371	14.3%	7:1	34%	10.4%	35.4%
Mid Argyll	6,003	270	4.5%	286	4.8%	362	6.0%	918	15.3%	3:1	44%	7.9%	36.5%
Cowal	9,100	349	3.8%	402	4.4%	469	5.2%	1220	13.4%	4:1	49%	9.0%	37.2%
Kintyre	4,297	170	4.0%	236	5.5%	150	3.5%	556	12.9%	2:1	37%	8.6%	37.6%
Bute	4,379	131	3.0%	230	5.3%	379	8.7%	740	16.9%	1:1	56%	10.5%	41.3%

Figure 12: Ineffective housing stock as a number and percentage per HMA in Argyll and Bute (Source: Argyll and Bute Council, October 2026)

Figure 13 shows the nature and distribution of secondary letting Short Term Lets (STL) across Argyll and Bute. The mapping shows high concentrations of STL's on our island communities, including Mull and Iona, Islay, Jura and Colonsay, and Coll and Tiree. Large concentrations can also be found in Lorn and the Inner Isles, which has the greatest number of STL's though this figure represents a lower percentage of housing market share in comparison to the aforementioned areas.



Figure 13: Percentage of housing stock that are Secondary Let STL by Housing Market Area

The Council have proposed STL control zones within four Housing Market Areas: Mull and Iona; Coll and Tiree; Islay, Jura and Colonsay; and within Lorn and the Inner Isles. These areas have high concentrations of STLs and as such are less resilient to absorbing the effects.

A paper detailing the reasons for a consultation has been published by Argyll and Bute. This states that in these areas there are *"high proportions of Second Homes and Long-Term Empty Properties compounded with Secondary Let STLs creates significant levels of non-effective housing stock"*

Figure 14 highlights the areas where STL control areas are proposed in Argyll and Bute.

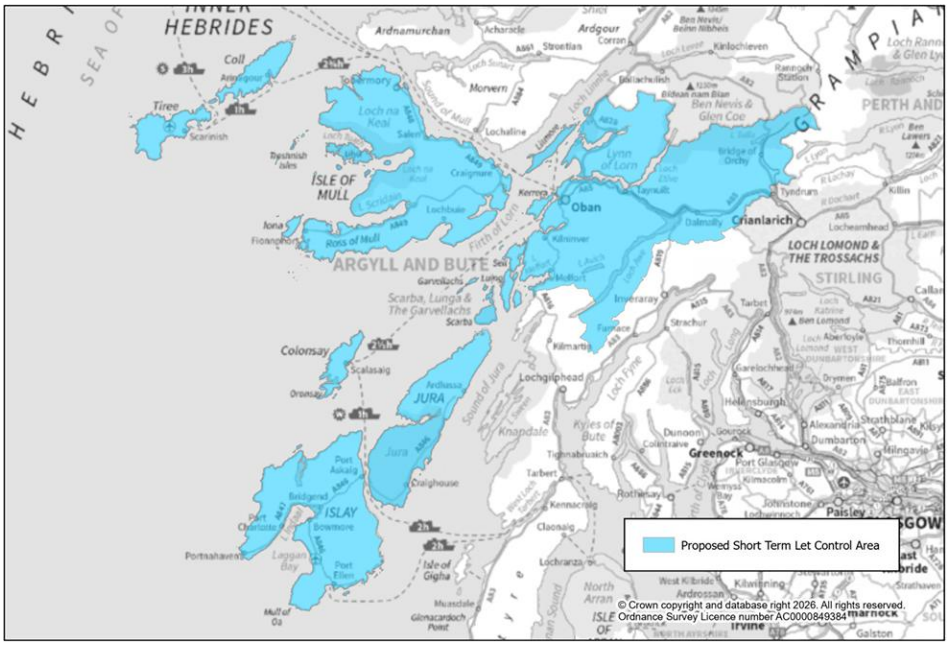


Figure 14: Proposed STL control area

Short Term Let tourism does have potential economic benefits beyond the direct payment for accommodation, i.e. helping support sectors like the food and drink industry, transport, and shopping and leisure uses. Argyll and Bute's paper on the consultation of a proposed STL control area refers to 2024 research by Biggar Economics on behalf of Scotland's Self-Caterers to analyse the economic impact of STLs in Scotland. The study shows that within Argyll and Bute, the use of

accommodation as Secondary STL presents a higher Annual GVA and job support than a residential property.

- Secondary STL Use: Annual GVA = £32,051 Jobs Supported: 0.8
- Residential Use: Annual GVA= £11,810 Jobs Supported: 0.1

However, Argyll and Bute Council's paper considers that economic benefit cannot solely be measured in terms of GVA or number of jobs supported, but additionally looks at potential societal benefits, including supporting population retention, and broader economic and community benefits.

The outcome of the consultation and any further decisions regarding the implementation of STL control areas will be taken into account during the preparation of LDP3.

Visitor Levy

The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 allows local authorities to choose whether to implement a levy on visitors staying overnight in paid accommodation. A visitor levy could raise funds to be reinvested into the sector, such as through improvement of visitor facilities, public toilets and car parks; to support development opportunities for visitor-focused businesses; or through enhancement of transport links, paths and access routes across Argyll and Bute. Guidance has been provided by the Scottish Government to accompany the Visitor Levy Scotland Act 2024, which outlines that a Visitor Levy scheme must have direct reference to local tourism strategies, or other associated documents, and set out how an economic levy could help sustain, support or deliver new facilities or services for those visiting the area, or otherwise connected to the visitor economy.

Argyll and Bute Council is currently exploring the introduction of a visitor levy. A public consultation is running until 5th October 2026 to consider the introduction of a flat-rate amount. Should the Council approve the introduction of a visitor levy, this would be taken into account by the planning authority during the preparation of LDP3

Local Place Plans

Luing

Within Luing's LPP projects of particular relevance to the Rural Development and Tourism topic paper are *Project 3.4 – An Active, Creative Community*, and *3.5 Thriving Economy – Local Jobs to reverse depopulation*. Providing greater employment opportunities through the development of workshops, studios and mineral extraction are seen as key projects to support development in a rural area.

Luing's LPP notes that the island provides *an active, working landscape with a unique heritage*. *Project 3.5 -Thriving Economy*, provides information on how local employment opportunities and tourism opportunities can help reverse depopulation. The LPP notes that tourism can help by celebrating the history, culture and natural beauty of the island.

Cove and Kilcreggan

The LPP identifies that the area performs poorly in terms of geographic access, referring to SIMD data. The LPP also makes reference to the Scottish Towns Partnership data, which has been covered earlier in this paper, noting that the area functions as a dependent to interdependent town. Other matters related to rural development include the approach to economic sustainability in the area, including the stimulation of new, small-scale businesses.

Tourism is mentioned in the LPP, noting that upgrades to existing walking paths could support the sustainable tourism sector in the area, which is mostly focused on access to Cove and Kilcreggan's rich natural assets. The LPP does also note the importance of attracting cultural tourism through integrating arts with village life to foster community and economic growth.

Gigha

The Gigha LPP notes the relevance of key NPF4 policies for Gigha:

- Tourism – *to encourage, promote and facilitate sustainable tourism development which benefits local people, is consistent with our net zero and nature commitments, and inspires people to visit Scotland*.
- Rural Development - *to encourage rural economic activity, innovation and diversification whilst ensuring that the distinctive character of the rural area and the service function of small towns, natural assets and cultural heritage are safeguarded and enhanced*.

The LPP includes analysis of the requirements for a positive visitor experience and notes that continuation of availability of a wide range of affordable, year-round accommodation options is crucial for tourism.

Part 2 of the LPP includes a summary of the islander survey and the issues identified as being most significant for planning Gigha's future. Of direct relevance to this Topic Paper (and NPF4 Policy 30) are:

Second homes and Holiday Lets
Recommendation: *Holiday accommodation development should be limited to property unsuited to all year round occupation*.

Campsite Extension
Recommendation: *Expansion of the existing campsite ought to be on the existing site or an adjacent location*.

Whilst recommendations in relation to historic assets and ferry infrastructure are of relevance to this Topic Paper (tourism), these are considered within the Historic Assets and Transport Topic Papers.

<u>Helensburgh</u>

Suggestions made by members of the community include:
'Repair/build new pier to gain tourist from the Waverley and the cruise ships docking in Greenock'
'There should be permanent infrastructure to support more community events and activities'
'Encourage more use of Colquhoun Square and the waterfront for community events'
“A dedicated museum for John Logie Baird and Henry Bell could attract visitors.”
'Something to stimulate the body and mind for all ages, such as skate parks, play areas, and outdoor gyms' 'We need more youth centres with activities like music, pool tables, and creative arts spaces' 'The Tower should be saved as a theatre, cinema, and community facility' 'We need a proper venue for community events, concerts, and exhibitions' 'More public art installations would enhance the town’s visual appeal
More community-led hospitality spaces would benefit residents and visitors'
'Helensburgh needs more B&B & hotel accommodation
'New coach parking for visitors and tours'

The LPP identifies the Pierhead site and Craigendoran Pier as having potential for tourism uses. LDP2 recognises this site as an area for action under reference A2003 for local, recreation and tourist related development, however, notes that consideration should be given to transportation and access issues.

Many of the Proposals within the LPP list NPF4 Policy 30 (Tourism) as a relevant policy. Most of these, however, are considered to fit primarily within Topic Papers 15: Town Centre and Retail, 14 Economy, Culture, Creativity and Community Wealth Building, 04 Historic Assets and Places, and 07: Transport, with tourism potentially affected as a result. As noted within the introduction to this topic paper, tourism overlaps with a number of topics covered in the Evidence Report, and the matters relating specifically to tourism is considered within this paper.

Whilst other Recommendations are of some relevance to this Topic Paper, they relate primarily to other Papers, such as:

- Proposal 9 - Vitality and viability of town centre (Topic Paper 15 - Town Centres and Retail)
- Proposal 10 – Historic streetscapes (Topic Paper 04 - Historic Assets)
- Proposal 22 – Coach parking (Topic Paper 07 – Transport)

Proposal 7 (and 14) are for what the Helensburgh community would like on the Helensburgh Pierhead Site. The community-supported vision for the Helensburgh Waterfront Development is "*to create a 'destination', an interesting and desirable place to visit and linger; a vibrant, sustainable community space for leisure and recreation that attracts visitors and enriches life in Helensburgh*" The Planning Authority recognises the Community Council views and proposals. However, the Waterfront Development has been allocated for retail use in the Adopted LDP2, and this position has been reaffirmed by a judicial review. The proposed use of the site is agreed and is acceptable in principle with regard to existing planning policy.

Proposal 8 (Helensburgh Pier)
The LPP notes that "*an operational Pier would provide economic benefits by attracting tourism, including cruise visitors, and could be used for holding events".*

Proposal 11 (Tower Arts Centre)
The Save The Tower Steering Group aims to buy the Tower Cinema complex and restore it as a Helensburgh Cultural Centre for community use.

Proposal 12 (Indoor Multi-use Facilities)

- *12.3: Consider the provision of exhibition and tourist facilities within the development of an indoor flexible use space*

Proposal 20 (Visitor Accommodation)
The community does "*not wish to encourage more self-catering short-term let in standard buildings, as this can result in under-used accommodation that could be used*

by permanent residents and tends to drive up rental prices. Conversion to B&B is a very appropriate use for some of our historic buildings".

- *20.1: Identify from our list of under-used or derelict sites potential sites for moderately priced visitor accommodation and designate the land for that use in LDP3.*

Ford (not yet validated)

The Ford LPP sets out 7 priorities. Those of which are relevant to rural development and/or tourism are:

- A village hall, which is a warm and welcoming space for the village and wider community.
- A community that has access to the countryside and its associated fauna and flora.

3 of the 5 proposals set out within the LPP are linked to the themes of this Topic Paper:

1. The community would like to purchase a 58-acre area of amenity land on the shores of Loch Awe. This project could provide local waterside amenities, together with managed space for nature and income-generating activities. It therefore has the potential to increase community access to the shores of Loch Awe, so increasing local people's wellbeing and sustainably delivering environmental benefits (linked to NPF4 policies 29 and 30).
2. To create a historical walking trail around Ford with information boards within the boundaries of the village (linked to NPF4 policy 29).
3. To build a new community hall for Ford Village on land owned by the current village hall committee (linked to NPF4 policy 29).

Coll (not yet validated)

Coll LPP recognises agriculture and tourism as two important economic sectors. Throughout the LPP engagement residents made it clear that whilst tourism plays an important role in the local economy, concerns were raised about becoming "over reliant" on a tourism-based economy and that economic diversity is welcomed. This is particularly important in relation to safeguarding natural assets. Overall, the Coll LPP supports the theme of sustainable rural development on the island, with 49 ideas identified in the LPP. However, it is recognised that geographical limitations, cost of transportation of goods and lack of infrastructure may hinder these types of development.

Dunoon and Kirn (not yet validated)

Dunoon and Kirn's LPP does not explicitly reference rural development in the text. Despite this, the themes and proposals presented throughout the plan, for example, "Inclusion in the economy" support the principles of sustainable rural growth.

The LPP states that the town has struggled to attract the same level of visitor numbers experience in the early 20th century, though it remains a key industry in the area today. The LPP highlights that bed capacity in Dunoon has suffered, including the closure of Glenmorag and McColl's Hotel. This has led to a limitation in the scale and type of events that the town can host, impacting levels of visitor spend within the local economy. The LPP references the 'Dunoon Project' may bring future investment linked to the tourism industry, though growth will need to be sustainably managed, including new accommodations options that do not impact on the "already stressed housing situation".

Jura (not yet validated)

One of the visions for Jura identified in the Community Action Plan (CAP) is to ensure the islands population and economy are growing sustainably.

The Jura CAP lists tourism as a primary industry on the island, with whisky, natural assets and history the main visitor attractions. The plan does state that there is potential to tap further into sustainable tourism, however, must balance the needs of the community. This includes the current lack of year-round, affordable tourism accommodation on the island, as identified in the plan.

Kilfinan (not yet validated)

Rural Development and Tourism are seen as key policies within the local plan area. As part of the community engagement, the plan seeks to develop rural solutions that sustain rural coastal communities. The plan identifies affordable and social housing with renewable energy as one of the key projects under the rural development policy. Furthermore, proposal 22 looks to support the creation of crofts, woodland crofts, small farms and smallholdings on an ongoing basis, with the aim of supporting local, rural regeneration.

No proposals in the LPP relate directly to tourism. However, the LPP does recognise that the culture, heritage, health and wellbeing, tourism, and the local economy are connected with the health of natural places, such as Kilfinan.

Lismore (not yet validated)

Lismore's LPP aims to create a healthy island economy, with jobs that can attract working families as well as securing work on the island for residents who are currently

travelling to the mainland. The LPP identifies rural development as the diversity of businesses and jobs that promote “flexible, sustainable and reliable employment”.

Tourism is identified in the LPP as an issue, with the main issue being the need for better tourism management. Currently, negative tourist behaviours, such as littering and fly car camping, are causing issues on the island. Solutions to combat this include the creation of a sustainable tourism plan, as well as a proposed Ranger post that spends time on the island to promote positive tourist behaviour. The LPP aims to develop sustainable tourism that protects the natural heritage from high visitor numbers. The plan does go on to state that 20% of the islands residents are connected or involved in the tourism sector in some capacity, highlighting its importance as a sector on the island.

Summary of Engagement

A working draft version of this template was shared with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Visit Scotland. Representations submitted at this stage are summarised below.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

HIE provided a bullet point summary of issues that need to be addressed within the preparation of the plan. Not all points relate to the content of evidence within the topic paper and relate to other stages of the plan preparation. However, the planning authority will consider all comments made by HIE at the relevant stages of the plan preparation process. Headings which received further comments from HIE are provided below.

- Overnight visitors and Day visitors. HIE comments state "the paper has a primary focus on overnight visitors. Day visitors to the area should also be considered, given their importance to the visitor economy."
- Seasonality
- Events and festivals
- Visitor spread
- Growth
- Marine Tourism
- Transport
- Future Focus

Furthermore, HIE provided links to other datasets which would be useful and worthy of inclusion. These have been listed below.

- Argyll and the Islands Strategic Tourism Partnership Strategy 2025-2028
- Giant Opportunities 2026 – 2030
- Visit Scotland – Travel Trends for Scotland

Comment: The documents listed above have been referenced within the text and listed as sources of evidence for the topic paper. Additional datasets from the Moffat Centre and the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions were also referred to in feedback. However, the planning authority are unable to access these datasets.
The planning authority has limited data on day visitor numbers, though does recognise that these visitors play a vital role in building local economic growth in the area. The planning authority will continue to update information of day visitors should additional data be found prior to the submission of the evidence report.

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

- Visit Scotland

The Council remains committed to working collaboratively with key agencies and welcome any comments they may have during the public engagement stage.

Summary of Implications

LDP3 will recognise the unique circumstances of rural and island communities across the planning authority area, whilst aiming to manage sustainable growth in accessible rural areas. LDP3 will also aim to support areas that face economic challenges from population decline, labour shortages and increasing difficulties relating to essential services and community infrastructure.

LDP2 policy 2 allows a flexible approach to development in countryside areas, in alignment with the flexible aims outlined in the Chief Planner's letter of 30th April 2025. However, consideration needs to be given to rural areas which are sensitive to development pressures which will be reflected through the LDP3 Spatial Strategy, and which may require consideration to be given to more individualised policies.

Current LDP2 policies 23-27 builds upon Policy 30 of NPF4, allowing for flexibility in tourism uses, recognising the importance of the sector within the local economy. However, growth will be required to be managed sustainably, ensuring that development proposals do not contribute significantly to increased pressures relating to overtourism, for example, to essential infrastructure like roads and ensuring there is sufficient housing for local residents. In this regard, consideration will be given to the outcomes of both the STL and Visitor Levy consultations, through development of the LDP3 Spatial Strategy as well as tourism policy.