

Bid for Oban City Status

Made by Argyll and Bute Council

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Summary

Oban (An t-Òban) brings everything positive about Scotland together in one place: dynamic island and mainland communities, a welcoming, caring and inclusive outlook, an exceptional natural environment, a rich, multi layered cultural and built history, innovative, ambitious, world leading businesses and community enterprises.

Oban is a unique place, inspired by its rich Gaelic heritage that delivers a city role to its numerous island and rural mainland communities, a highly creative place that attracts and inspires people to live here, and also visit by their thousands each year from across the world.

Feeding and sustaining the nation: Oban began developing as a thriving port when it first shipped products (wool, fish, slate, kelp and alcohol) to larger ports such as Liverpool and Glasgow; present-day, its outstanding products are available globally.

Defending and protecting the nation: Oban's strategic location, and transport infrastructure supported both naval and air force bases during WW2; continuing during the cold war, the first transatlantic telephone cable, carrying the Hot Line between the US Presidents and USSR General Secretaries came ashore at Oban's Gallanach Bay.

Attracting the world to the UK: the tiny island of Iona, lying off Oban has been the birthplace of Scottish Christianity since St Columba stepped ashore in AD563 and the burial place of over 50 of Scotland's kings; today, Oban and its surrounding islands are key in attracting national and international tourism, a key mainstay of the local economy.

Taking the UK to the world: known as the 'seafood capital of Scotland', Oban produce promotes the UK to consumers across the world; world class research into marine science, enabled by Oban's natural resources, is supporting the world's drive for sustainable living, connecting with others for example at COP26.

Supporting people and communities: from businesses coming together to become Scotland's first whole town BID (business improvement district) area, to award winning pipe bands; to community run sports, education, museum, radio and cinema services, Oban is a place where local people take positive action to thrive together.

Ambitious for the future: in challenging times, ambition and optimism continue in Oban, creating new affordable homes, new community facilities, improved connectivity and cleaner power energy solutions. Our innovative Rural Growth Deal, a partnership between the local authority, Scottish and UK governments, is just one example of a clear commitment to delivering an enhanced way of life in Oban, Scotland and the UK.

In brief, the West of Scotland needs Oban as a city: it already delivers a city role to its numerous island and rural mainland communities, from health and education services, to local and national transport connections; currently the nearest cities are hours away.

City status for Oban would define and support the key strategic role that this beautiful place provides, as a driver for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and long term prosperity, locally and nationally.

Distinct identity: Oban - Scotland in one place

Oban occupies a strategically important location on the west coast of Scotland that uniquely supports a number of growing rural mainland and island communities. A key gateway to the Highlands and Islands, a service centre and tourist hub, Oban has a historically important place in our collective national identity, and today is a vibrant community that 'punches well above its weight' as a place to live, visit, learn and be innovative in business. When brought together this all creates a special identity for this 'Scotland in one place' town.

Oban's outstandingly beautiful coastal location inspires countless photos, from sunrise to sunset, that are shared, and so promote, Scotland across the world. The views are simply stunning for example, from the unique McCaig's Folly, overlooking Oban Bay, and the islands of Kerrera, Lismore and Mull beyond that can all be reached by ferry from Oban Harbour.

Oban is the source of all levels of education, general health facilities, retail and employment opportunities for rural and island communities alike. It's a place with successful schools and colleges that have embraced digital technology to share teaching across campuses in Oban and our island communities.

Oban's key role in the history of the nation remains visible today. From the ruined castles dominating the landscape, such as Dunollie, or the Royal Fortress of Dunstaffnage, to highly visible reminders of ancient communities and rulers, including Dunadd Fort, the crowning place of the first Kings of Scotland, and the ancient landscape of Kilmartin Glen, Europe's greatest site of carved rock.

From a cultural point of view, Oban is a national centre of Gaelic language and music, the first place to host the centenary Gaelic language Royal National MOD event in 1892, the first place to hold the event following Royal status in 1992 with the next Royal National MOD due in Oban in 2024.

The influence of the area's fantastic natural environment and resources are obvious in wide ranging aspects of life in Oban. For example, as well as two built cathedrals, Scotland's only living cathedral is in woodland on the outskirts of Oban - the Glencruitten Cathedral of Trees; and known as the seafood capital of Scotland, Oban's food and drink products grace tables across the globe with the highest quality of produce from whisky to lobsters.

Moreover, Oban is a place of innovation with world class research taking place focussed on our marine environment and addressing climate change, the world's greatest challenge.

Civic Pride

Today, the main commercial centre of Oban is based along the seafront, from the many hotels and guest houses of the impressive Esplanade to the shops, restaurants and bars of the busy town centre. Residential areas, home to numerous pretty Victorian and Edwardian villas, sit on the slopes that rise from the sea, set back from the main streets with more modern housing, retail and business areas.

Oban wants the best for its residents, businesses and visitors. A historic example of this is the iconic McCaig's Tower, known also as McCaig's Folly, a prominent and instantly recognisable Oban landmark.

Built in 1897 by local banker John Stuart McCaig, the aim of the tower was in part to provide a lasting monument to the McCaig family, but additionally, the significant investment was intended to provide work for local stonemasons. Today the striking circular tower serves the community in different ways, as a key visitor attraction with its stunning views over Oban bay to its surrounding islands, and as a peaceful escape from the hustle and bustle of town life.

In recent times, significant public sector investment has transformed Oban's public realm and port facilities. This rejuvenation includes a new ferry terminal, new school and the development of the council-owned North Pier pontoons that welcomes yachts and cruise ships from across the world.

While work goes on to improve the area for people now, the focus of Oban and wider Argyll and Bute communities is also on the longer term future.

Oban, with its growing population, is the exception to the rule of on-going population decline across Argyll and Bute as a whole. To build a sustainable future, the area must reverse this decline, and attract the people, skills and investment our communities and people will need to live their lives.

Oban has a key strategic role to play in meeting this challenge. It already serves as a city to numerous smaller mainland and island communities in the area - its nearest city, at this time, is Glasgow at 90 miles away by road, and the next after that Inverness at 110 miles away, again by road.

Oban connects island, mainland and wider Scottish and UK communities, with each other, and with services, people and economic opportunities.

Connectivity

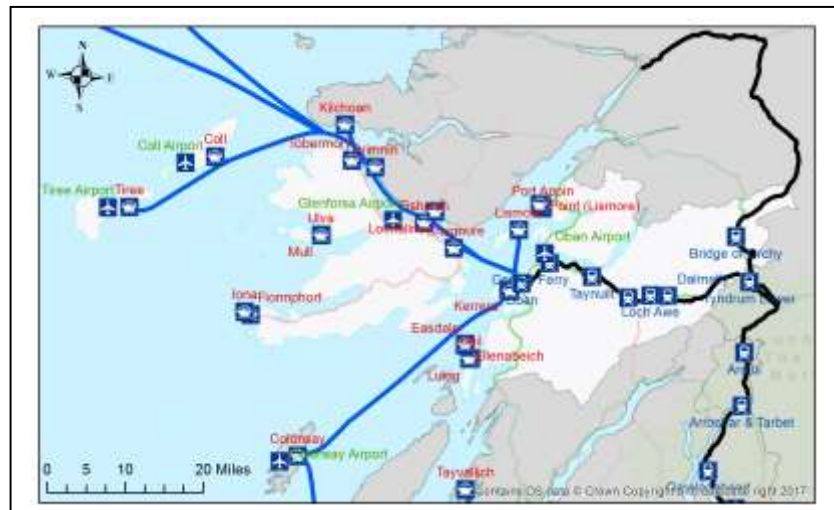
Rail: Oban's train station is in the centre of the town. Regular, daily services to and from Glasgow take you along the world-famous West Highland Line.

Road: its scenery makes travelling to Oban an event in itself. Around three hours by car, coach or train from Glasgow, or Edinburgh, the scenic journey is a memorable part of a visit to the area.

Air: Oban's airport provides scheduled flights to and from the islands of Coll, Tiree, Colonsay and Islay, and welcomes chartered and private flights from various locations.

Bus: regular bus services take people to and from the central belt.

Sea: Oban is a busy ferry port – total vessel movements exceed 32,000 transits per year - providing ferry services to and from numerous islands - Mull, Colonsay, Coll, Tiree, Lismore, Barra and South Uist. Many of these ferries link up with other islands - Iona, Kerrera, Easdale and Luing. Oban is also a key and increasingly popular destination for cruise liners, bringing tourism to the area.



Cycling: Oban is on Route 78 of the National Cycle Network which goes up to Fort William and down to Campbeltown.

While Oban has this city role and responsibility, it does not currently have the external investment and opportunities available to recognised cities. Bidding for city status for Oban is therefore about supporting the long term future of Argyll and Bute as a whole, as well as developing a new city with key contributions to make more widely to Scotland and the UK.

This ambition is reflected in the strong public backing we have received for this bid: from the young people of Oban High School, to members of the public generally, key partners, businesses and local politicians, the wish to stand up for Oban and secure city status for the town is widespread.

Culture

Oban has a distinct cultural identity that has empowered civic pride and positive action for shared community benefit.

Examples include: Atlantis Community Leisure, run for the community by the community, a charity that operates Oban's main leisure centre, offering a range of indoor and outdoor facilities including a swimming pool; and the 'Community Benefit Society Oban Communities Trust' was formed by community volunteers to take ownership of and transform the former Rockfield Victorian primary school into a thriving community hub and centre of education, wellbeing, history, arts and culture operating in the heart of Oban town centre.

Cultural opportunities are evident in the town throughout the year.

Oban High School, located in the heart of the town, offers first class educational facilities. An outstanding example of its cultural activities is its award winning School Pipe Band that regularly competes in national competitions producing and inspiring world class Pipers

including Stuart Liddell, born in Oban, the Pipe Major of the current grade 1 world champions, Inveraray.

Every August, Oban hosts the Argyllshire Gathering Highland Games, headed by the Duke of Argyll, which attracts local and international visitors. Founded in 1871 by several Argyll families the Gathering was a forerunner of Highland Games as we know them today. The Argyllshire Gathering Trust is the charitable organisation that runs the event, and seeks to advance the education of the public in the art of the Highland bagpipes, Scottish dancing, folk music, Scottish heritage and culture.

The visible presence of the area's history also contributes to an awareness of Oban as a place that matters, with an important role to play, locally and nationally.

Over 5,000 years of human history for example can be traced in Oban itself, its wider district of Lorn, and towards Kilmartin Valley, on the outskirts of Oban, an ancient landscape with 350 ancient monuments, of which 150 are prehistoric, interpreted by the expanding Kilmartin Museum of Ancient History. This is a unique place of prehistoric monuments - chambered cairns, round cairns, cists, standing stones and rock carvings - including Dunadd, an imposing iron age fort, that has a very special place in Scottish history as the capital of the Ancient Kingdom of Dalriada. Legend has it that the Stone of Destiny was used here in the crowning of the first Kings of Scotland.

In 2010, a fabric of great historic significance was discovered in Oban's Dunollie House. A tartan was found which dated back to the early 18th Century and pre-dated clan tartans. This historic fabric has been given the name Dalriada, to encapsulate the heritage of this ancient tartan.

Present-day, the high levels of maritime traffic, operating from a range of piers, jetties, slipways and pontoons, support the town's culture as one of welcome for visitors and of national and international significance for Oban.

Mixing both history, and today's outward-looking approach to different visitors and cultures, is Oban's support for the development of the Gaelic language.

'An Comunn Gàidhealach' (the Gaelic Association) was founded in Oban in 1891, to support the teaching, learning and use of the Gaelic language and the study and cultivation of Gaelic literature, history, music and art.

Every 6 to 8 years or so Oban hosts the Royal National Mod, a competition festival of Scottish Gaelic song, arts and culture and attracts thousands of competitors and visitors.

The local authority has worked in partnership with the local community to develop a Gaelic Language Centre 'Furan' (meaning a very warm welcome) which provides the community with Gaelic learning and speaking opportunities.

Numerous voluntary organisations have been supported to assist with young people and older people's Gaelic including conversations with native Gaelic speaker residents in local care homes. A Gaelic Community Officer is based in Oban to assist the development of Gaelic language, culture and music with much of the work focussed on Oban and the isles where the majority of Gaelic speakers live in Argyll.

Vibrant and welcoming community

Oban and the area it serves has a growing and dynamic population that continues to welcome thousands of visitors every year with the vast majority returning year after year to enjoy the town's famous hospitality and outstanding cultural and natural environment.

The town is an inclusive community with a large number of community organisations, many of them entirely voluntary, often working in partnership with local businesses and public agencies for the greater good of the local community and visitors alike. For example:

- The Oban Common Good Fund was set up in 1913 by Miss Janet Sinclair "for the Common good of the Burgh of Oban and its inhabitants". Administered by the council, the fund has distributed £250k to good causes in Oban over the last 8 years alone.
- Oban FM Radio, established in 1949, is a community owned radio station, broadcasting diverse programmes produced by volunteers, to North Argyll.
- Phoenix Cinema in Oban is an independent, community-owned cinema, and a registered charity, that screens an eclectic mix of film including arthouse, big blockbuster movies and live streamed theatre.
- The charitable organisation Stramash, with their innovative outdoor nurseries, was first located in Oban; with stunning views over to the islands of Lismore and Mull and a fantastic climbing tree, mud kitchen and fire circle, it gave children from 3 to 5 the childhood we all dreamed about.
- Oban secured Fairtrade Town status in 2006 following a considerable effort by the local community to ensure fair prices are paid to farmers and producers.
- The charitable organisation Oban Pride was formed in 2019 to support local people from the LGBTQ+ community and take part in activities including an annual Oban Pride March.
- Oban is Scotland's first whole town BID (Business Improvement District) area. Over the 10 years that the Bid4Oban partnership of local businesses has existed, there has been significant business growth recorded in the town. Bid4Oban, working with numerous partners, has invested considerable sums in shopfront improvement projects, extending the tourist season, town centre wifi, marketing and promotional initiatives, facilitating a growing number of major festivals and events, together with a wide range of other environmental improvements to the town. Bid4Oban remains ambitious for Oban and forward thinking, recently merging with the local tourist organisation Oban, Lorn and the Isles Tourist Association (OLTA).

Record of Innovation

From the earliest of times Oban has been a place of innovation and industry. For example, in 1774 one of Scotland's oldest distilleries was established, still in production today, and a key visitor attraction in the heart of the town centre. The possibility of trade to other parts of the UK and abroad lay at the heart of this innovation, with opportunities for export first by fast steamer services to Glasgow and then by rail following its arrival in 1880, and now also through modern road and air links that connect Oban directly to Glasgow, Edinburgh and ultimately the rest of the UK.

Oban has witnessed the rapid expansion of commercial forestry over many decades and has at the same time embraced the production of clean energy most notably at nearby Cruachan, home to "The Hollow Mountain", hydro pumped storage station.

A number of commercial on shore wind farms operate in the Oban area with further expansion recently approved together with substantial investments in electricity grid infrastructure. Green hydrogen production is also planned, with the aim of supplying the town's local gas network and fuelling future transport options, in the drive to reach net zero across Argyll and Bute.

Oban is a long established University Town with 1,000 students attending the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) – University of the Highlands and the Islands (UHI), Argyll College. The Lorn and District General Hospital that is located in Oban also provides training in skills that the local area will need into the future. The town offers an expanding range of courses from vocational to PHD level with ambitious plans to expand student numbers to 1,700 over the next decade increasingly focussed on innovative, marine based qualifications.

SAMS has been delivering independent marine science services in Oban since 1970. SAMS' 150 highly qualified staff are working for healthy and sustainably managed seas and oceans through world-class marine research, education and wider engagement with society including most recently at COP26.

Working in partnership with the Natural Environment Research Council and HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise), the neighbouring European Marine Science Park is expanding as more space is now required for growing companies, attracted to Oban and emerging from the SAMS business incubator programme and with the ambition of creating a marine technopole including a new seaweed nursery and academy.

A recent example of this ambition is the establishment of Scotland's first commercial, and community owned, seaweed farm near Oban. This investment is helping to start a new industry with the likes of Oceanium, an Oban based seaweed and food innovation company recently raising £2m of finance to scale up the process of turning sustainably farmed seaweed into sustainable packaging.

Further examples of innovation include:-

- Oban based Cuan Tec, who have created a novel process, using biology, to extract high quality chitin from fisheries waste, to create non-plastic alternatives for products of high consumer demand.
- The recent construction of Scottish Sea Farms state-of-the-art £58 million hatchery at Barcaldine, on the outskirts of Oban, that sustainably produces up to 10 million salmon smolts every year to supply their 42 salmon farms located across Scotland.
- Green Power is taking forward a proposal to create a green hydrogen hub in Oban, developing the fuel of the future.

This ambition for innovation is further supported by the council working with partners such as HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise) and the UK and Scottish Governments in implementing the Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal (RGD).

Our RGD focusses on innovation in the marine sector, improving opportunities for skills and training, investing in digital technology including 5G in Oban, and the delivery of Scotland's Marine Training School at Oban's European Marine Science Park currently being taken forward by Argyll College – UHI with an ambition for 500 additional students attending each year, providing new talent for over 100 marine based companies operating within 20 miles of Oban.

Innovation in Oban extends beyond the marine environment. For example, Oban's airport is developing as UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles) hub designed to serve Oban's rural hinterland. With successful drone trials now completed, delivering mail and NHS material across Argyll, the project is being advanced to full business case by the council and the private company Skyrora as a part of our RGD.

Sound Governance and Administration

Oban lies within the Local Authority (LA) area of Argyll and Bute (Earra-Ghaidheal agus Bod), one of 32 unitary authority council areas in Scotland, and a lieutenancy area (current Lord-Lieutenant for Argyll and Bute is Jane Margaret MacLeod).

Argyll and Bute is divided into four administrative areas with Oban effectively the capital of the Oban, Lorn and the Isles district. It is served by its own Area Committee, of elected local councillors, that meets regularly to take decisions on the future of the local areas and make recommendations to the council's central committees.

Oban and its surrounding communities all have highly active community councils that meet regularly to discuss and take decisions on the issues that matter to local communities.

Associations with Royalty

Throughout history, Royal connections have played a key part in Oban's development; and Oban has served royalty as a place from which to govern, and to enjoy.

A royal charter raised the town to a burgh of barony in 1811. The popularity of Sir Walter Scott's poem, 'Lord of the Isles', attracted Queen Victoria to visit Oban in 1847 where she commented in her journal that it was "one of the finest spots we have seen". From that date,

the swift steamer route, to Oban and the West Highlands was known as the “Royal Route” greatly increasing patronage to Oban. Her son Prince Alfred also visited Oban in 1863 serving as a lieutenant on board the HMS ship Racoon based at Oban for a time.

Royal connections to normal life in Oban continue to the present-day. The Highland Cattle Society has Her Majesty the Queen as patron. It holds its two premium Highland Cattle sales in Oban each year attracting buyers from around the world to the area.

Oban’s most recent royal visit was in 2021, when the town was delighted to welcome HRH Princess Royal, to meet local young people at the new Oban High School.

The Queen’s Representative for the area, Lord Lieutenant Jane Macleod, has provided a letter of support for bringing city status to Oban.

Other features (including significant contributions to society)

The town can also demonstrate a strong, sporting pedigree, being surrounded by an outstanding natural environment that offers endless opportunities for sailing, scuba diving, wild swimming, coastal kayaking, mountain biking and walking. Participating in traditional sports are also to the fore with Oban often hosting Shinty’s most prestigious cup competitions, including the Camanachd Cup, at the town’s Mossfield stadium.

Rugby, football, martial arts and golf are all important activities as is motorsports with Oban producing a number of high performing sports people, including the champion golfer Bob MacIntyre, and Susie Wolff MBE, a former professional racing driver.

Oban’s stunning natural environment itself makes a notable contribution to the world, via entertainment. It regularly provides the backdrop for film, TV and other productions, including for example, films Ring of Bright Water and Enigma, and TV’s Top Gear filmed at Oban Airport.

Population of the area

Oban’s resident population is circa 8,500 and continues to grow both within the boundaries of the town and new suburbs for example at nearby Dun, together with expanding village communities such as Connel, North Connel, Barcaldine, Dalmally, Benderloch and Taynuilt, making it one of the largest communities of the south west Highlands and Argyll.

The town also functions as the gateway to the island communities of Mull, Tiree, Coll, Colonsay, Lismore, Kerrera, Islay, Barra and South Uist. It is regarded as an informal capital of North Argyll (Lorn) providing essential services (education, water treatment, health and retail) together with employment opportunities to a much larger, dispersed rural population of approximately 15,000.



The resident population of Oban swells to 25,000 at the height of the summer making it an exceptionally busy tourist hub that is increasingly popular with both UK and International visitors from all corners of the world.

Economic activity

Multi-million pound investment, by Argyll and Bute Council, the Scottish Government, and HIE (Highlands and Islands Enterprise), is transforming Oban as a place to visit and live, and as an economic driver for the area.

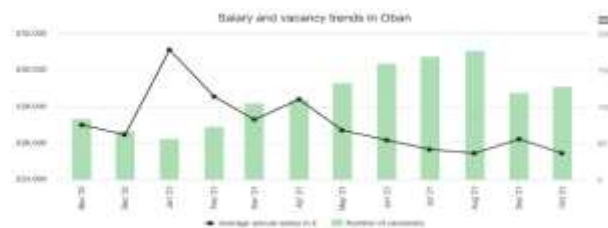
For example, building on the potential of the town's location, public realm development of more than £3 million delivered a fabulous terraced space, looking over the bay; centrally located Station Square is a convenient transport interchange for ferry, rail and buses, with a flexible space for events; and Oban boasts a transit berthing facility and supporting services, to realise the area's potential as a 'must visit' location for marine tourism, and providing easy step-ashore access to the town centre.



These marine facilities also provide commercial spaces to let and an outdoor space for events and markets. It is estimated that the increase in visitor numbers that these facilities will generate will be worth £20 million to the area over the next 25 years.

Oban has a very vibrant and dynamic economy, largely based around tourism, aquaculture, retail and food and drink. Oban was one of the first local areas to show signs of recovery after covid lockdowns. Local employment information is below:

- * The average Oban salary is £25,808.
- * The top companies hiring in Oban are Start Your New Career, Lidl and Diageo.
- * Salaries in Oban have gone down 5.8% year-on-year while the national annual change is— 5.0%
- * Most live job ads in Oban are for Hospitality & Catering Jobs and Healthcare & Nursing Jobs.
- * Currently (November 2021) there are 111 live job ads in Oban, out of 1,345,004 jobs nationally.



Tourism plays a key role in the economy of Argyll and Bute, and Oban is central to attracting tourism to the area. As the main transport hub, with regular, daily public transport connections to and from Glasgow, many visitors arrive into Oban, by road, rail, sea, bus or air.



Outdoor adventure activities, visible history, amazing, diverse wildlife, fantastic food and drink to enjoy – Oban attracts visitors of all ages and interests.



Tourism's role is reflected in the main local employment sectors - health, retail, accommodation and food services, and professional, scientific and technical. Agriculture, forestry, education, construction and manufacturing all feature too in Oban's economy.

Houses in Oban range from five bedroom detached houses in countryside settings and cosy bungalows, to a town centre studio flat and development opportunities. The average house price in Oban today is £229,429, with a rise of 4.42% in the last year.



With the council funding support for affordable accommodation, this year saw completion of the development of 300 new houses available for social rent, including homes for people with additional needs and also single living accommodation in the Oban area.

Oban Lorn and the Isles has an extensive supply of business land available with 12 designated sites and one Strategic Business Location at the European Marine Science Park (EMSP). These are largely based in and on the outskirts of Oban, but a few of them are on the wider Lorn area including island communities.

About 89% of residents aged 16-64 in the Oban travel-to-work area have qualifications equivalent to NVQ1 or above while 38% have qualifications equivalent to NVQ4 or above. This is generally higher than the national average. Fewer than 6% have no qualification..

Oban's role as a sustainable economic driver for Argyll and Bute is set to grow. Part of Argyll and Bute's £70 million Rural Growth Deal (RGD) will focus on developing the area's digital infrastructure.

This investment will take advantage of increased interest in the lifestyle and work/life balance opportunities on offer Oban and Argyll and Bute, given the widespread, covid-safe, move to working from home. For Oban this enhanced digital connectivity will help drive innovation in business practice, improve public and private service delivery through the use of drones or AI (artificial intelligence) for example and reduce the need to travel helping to ensure a 'green' recovery.

Skills development – further and higher education

Oban High School has a brand new £36 million, state-of-the-art building which opened its doors to pupils in 2018.

The school is a six year, non-denominational school near the centre of Oban serving the town itself, surrounding villages and the scattered rural and island communities of North Argyll. It has capacity for up to 1,300 pupils, some of whom travel daily from mainland and island communities.

Young people from the islands of Colonsay, Coll, Mull, Lismore, Iona, Kerrera, Shuna and Easdale as well as from Bridge of Orchy who live too far away to travel every day can stay at the Council's Glencruitten Hostel. In this vast geographic catchment area there are 21 associated primary schools varying in size from large town primaries to small rural schools.

From S4 to S6, the school offers a wide range of courses and programmes providing flexible learning pathways to meet the needs of individuals and groups. A wide range of partnerships, with for example Argyll College, Open University and local employers, extends the opportunities available to young people, to gain skills and work-based experience in a profession or industry that they may wish to pursue on leaving school.

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI): Oban is home to nearly 1,000 students and a number of higher education campuses, including the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) and Argyll College UHI, which are partners of the University of the Highlands and Islands.



The ambition of the 'Oban as a University Town' project is to foster economic growth, retain and grow working age population. This goal is pursued by ensuring a good range of courses that are relevant to the area's economy and that will ultimately provide a well-skilled work force to support business growth and development.

SAMS has been delivering independent marine science since 1884. Based in Oban, it attracts local and international students to work for healthy and sustainably managed seas and oceans through world-class marine research, education and engagement with society.

This role is set to develop with the development of a research and development centre for the international seaweed and shellfish industry, as part of Argyll and Bute Council's Rural Growth Deal. This will create a platform for industrial innovation that will allow a direct commercialisation of the world leading research expertise at SAMS and serve as a catalyst for growth in the region's high value seaweed and shellfish industries.

Argyll College UHI is one of the partner institutions of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and Argyll's largest provider of further and higher education. The College works closely with the region's schools, giving pupils access to college courses as an integral part of their school curriculum. Subject areas covered align with local economy needs, as well as equipping young people and learners to follow varied career paths.



The College also provides a range of certified training and professional development opportunities for local businesses. Current course provision closely aligns with the skillsets required by local employers.

For example, development of Argyll College UHI Marine Industry Training Centre as part of the area's Rural Growth Deal (RGD) will provide education and training needs to support future demands for the marine industry in Argyll and Bute. The Centre will support work-based learning and vocational training, and providing workforce pathways from school to employment, complementing the education provision at SAMS, UHI, and the University of Stirling.

Another part of the RGD — Rural Skills Accelerator Programme - will provide the 21st century infrastructure and delivery mechanisms needed for skills, training, education and enterprise to facilitate collaborative growth in the rural economy. The Rural Skills Accelerator Programme will set the foundation for ongoing inclusive growth and fair work opportunities which will help attract and retain economically active people and support businesses growth throughout Argyll and Bute.

Public green spaces, sport and leisure facilities, and shopping centres

Oban is home to both small individual shops and cafes, and national retailers. The wide variety of bars and restaurants serving fresh, locally caught seafood gained for Oban the accolade of 'Seafood Capital of Scotland'.



Atlantis Leisure, a community-run centre, provides fitness and other leisure services, and Oban's natural environment adds to this a fantastic choice of outdoor activities from diving, kayaking, sailing, walking, and cycling to paddling, wildlife-spotting, beach strolls, or simply enjoying the spectacular scenery. Oban offers an adventure playground right on your doorstep.

Oban also caters for creative interests. For example, it has a School of Traditional Music, recording facilities and live music venues, and supports the development of the Gaelic language.

Oban comes with its 'ready-built' green spaces – it is surrounded by some of Scotland's most beautiful scenery; connecting with nature, whether to relax or re-energise, is easy in Oban. That said, the town also provides play park facilities for its younger visitors and residents, and the mild west coast climate and historic connections with some of Scotland's best known



Victorian plant collectors provide ideal growing conditions for some spectacular gardens.

Local authority support of the voluntary sector

Oban is a place where people matter; where the individual can make a difference to their community and the lives of others who live in, depend on or visit Oban. This is obvious for example in the role the voluntary sector plays, with support from Argyll and Bute Council.

The council works closely with the voluntary sector to empower and facilitate communities and voluntary groups, in addressing issues that matter to local people, and supporting the health, wellbeing, and economic success of the . Key work with the voluntary sector in Oban recently includes:

- **Fairer, inclusive communities:** our Supporting Communities Fund provides direct funding for the voluntary sector organisations to create fairer communities by tackling poverty and sharing opportunities, to develop resilient, greener cleaner, creative and inclusive communities.

Through these funds we support projects such as the Lorn and Oban Healthy Options, a charity working with people who have, or are at risk of developing, life-long health conditions, delivering a specialist service which supports people to learn the skills and tools to self-manage their health and wellbeing.

Others include the Minority Ethnic Carers of People, the Oban and District Access Panel who help tackle barriers for people with mobility issues and the Oban Men's Shed who provide a key social support space for retired people to meet and share skills and conversations and address issues of loneliness and self-worth.

- **Healthy communities:** We provide funding via our local Health Integration Joint Board for voluntary-led health support services; our newly introduced Micro Grants provided funding to ensure that community hubs and venues are covid-safe for use (through for example signage, training or protective equipment); the Oban Common Good Fund supports a wide range of health and wellbeing and cultural projects that are important to residents, meet a local need, and play a role in civic pride.

Funded projects have included for example, the Oban Community Sports Hub, Mossfield Sports and Event Stadium, the proposed Oban Skate Park, the community run playpark and the local football club.

- **Economic growth:** The council also provides funding for strategic events and festivals, to support local economies and the quality of life in our communities.

Examples in Oban include the Oban Games, the historic Argyllshire Gathering and the contemporary Oban Live music event. The Gathering and the Games are part of a rich tradition that sees local people and those from across the world competing in a range of music, dance and sporting events.

These events are important to the local community, providing a focus for Gaelic cultural learning of music, spoken work and dance and a celebration which generates civic pride and attracts visitors from all across the world.

As well as direct funding, the local authority supports the voluntary sector in other ways, including council skills and knowledge, bidding for external funding for works, acting as a critical friend for projects and training.

Recent projects include:

- **Cultural** - *Rockfield Centre*, a former primary school now owned and run by the community, serving arts and heritage to the local community and visitors helping to make Oban a year round destination; *Oban Phoenix Cinema*, a two screen refurbished community run cinema which opened in 2012, after the original commercial cinema closed its doors in 2010 – saving people a 100 mile drive to the closest cinema; *Corran Halls* operated by Live Argyll a theatre and community hall facility
- **Health and Wellbeing** - *Atlantis Leisure*, a trail blazing community enterprise run by a local volunteer board that provides sports and physical services to the wider area; *Oban Substance Misuse Group*, which supports recovery from the harmful use of alcohol and drugs; *Friends of Oban Community Playpark* who maintain a local

garden and play park to flourish for all to enjoy; *Hope Kitchen* runs a recovery café and foodbank support, targeted towards homeless, addictions and mental health; *Adventure Oban* who wish to establish an outdoor sports facility for the local community based on council land at Ganavan Beach on the edge of Oban

- **Environment** - *Bid4Oban*, who work to improve Oban as a place to live, work and visit, creating a vibrant environment and supporting events that celebrate Oban's civic life.

Addressing inequalities - *Argyll Community Housing Association, West Highland Housing Association and LINK* who provide affordable housing in the area to tackle the issues of rising house prices and fuel poverty.

