

Chief Executive / Àrd-òifigear
Sally Loudon

Ms Danielle Clark
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Date: 10 February 2015
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Dear Ms Clark

Thank you for your letter dated the 01 February 2015 regarding the above matter. The Council is undertaking a wide range of initiatives to counter de population in parts of Argyll and Bute. Our 2014 Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) sets out the overall direction and vision for the area until 2023 together with our approach to the main issues that face Argyll and Bute.. It has been agreed by all Community Planning Partners and approved by the Scottish Government. The overarching aim of the SOA is to develop our economy through a growing population. This agreement has also informed the council's strategic and area Economic Development Action Plans that were refreshed in 2014 and is also linked to our new Local development Plan that has also been subject to a public local inquiry and council approval in January 2015. All these documents can be found on the council's web site and have been informed by public consultation at their different stages of development.

You are correct in identifying that public finances are experiencing severe pressure and will continue to do for the foreseeable future. This is why the Council is committed to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to maximise our resources and lever in external funding throughout Argyll and Bute including Cowal. In particular, the council is working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Scottish Development International and our own business gateway team to support the growth of existing and new businesses in our area with 1,500 businesses in Argyll and Bute having been supported over the last 3 years by Business Gateway. Additional information on the activities of the council's Business Gateway's service can be found in regular local press articles and on the council's web site.

Another key action which was endorsed by the recent economic summit held in Dunoon in October 2014 was the formation of the Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum Economic Forum (ABSEF). ABSEF will be led by the private sector



with senior public sector representatives, including the Scottish Government, to focus on economic and population growth. A high profile private sector chair will be announced shortly and the forum is scheduled to meet in early spring.

The council and HIE are also working on a number of projects designed to increase the number of jobs created in Bute and Cowal by creating new business space, improving schools, restoring buildings, assisting communities in their development and creating new infrastructure. I have listed some of these projects at the end of this letter.

Work is ongoing on assisting the roll out of modern broadband technology and mobile phone signal with Dunoon shortly to go on stream and Bute now connected by sub sea fibre cable. Better digital connectivity will not only help local residents in their daily lives but also assist business growth including the important tourism sector. Additional support to the local tourist industry is currently being delivered through the Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative (AITC) which has been supported by both the Council and HIE through a combined grant of £100k per annum for the next three years. This funding has allowed the AITC to produce 1,000,000 leaflets promoting Argyll and Bute, to attend marketing events and improve their website and also to employ seven tourism development agents to help promote the local tourism industry.

A business audit by EKOS economic consultants is currently underway commissioned by the council and our partners looking at business requirements in terms of skill requirement and mapping our business assets. This work is scheduled to be concluded by the end of March and will inform the Council's response to focused support for local businesses and European Funding opportunities including the European Social Fund together with LEADER which will recommence in 2015. The LEADER fund will be led by the Council following a highly successful delivery of the last program.

The Council is also working closely with Transport Scotland on the ferry review that has major implications for the whole of Argyll and Bute including the provision of ferry services to Dunoon town centre. In addition, the Council welcomes the introduction of road equivalent tariffs to Bute from October 2015 which will help address a key barrier to growth that this island is facing. Work also continues on lobbying the Scottish Government to further improve the A83 and A82 which are critical transport links for our area. An additional £3 million of investment was announced for the A83 last month by the Scottish Government.

The Council is also delivering affordable housing through its own strategic housing fund and Scottish Government funding and has exceeded its target in Argyll and Bute by over 200 houses during the last Strategic Housing Investment Plan period and aims to build a minimum of 100 affordable houses per annum over the next 5 years.

Planning and building regulations are primarily set by the Scottish Government however the Council's planning service works to support the aspirations of those looking to build in the area. This service has recently been endorsed once again by the Scottish Government following the publication of the 2014 planning performance framework which noted the "open for business approach" that was adopted. In addition the new Local Development Plan has identified over £1 billion of development opportunities in the area.

Bute and Cowal

- Pavillion refurb and creation of community hub - on site in 2016 - Council, Regional Capital Grant Fund, Coastal Communities Fund, HIE and Heritage Lottery Fund funding secured - £9.2 million project;
- Rothesay Townscape Heritage Initiative and Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) nearing completion – new tesco scheduled to open in 2015 on former Guildford Square gap site;
- Royal Hotel secured structural integrity of building through Council investment;
- Mount Stuart £8.5 million investment in estate buildings and better tourism offer on site;
- Queens Hall Dunoon skills and wellbeing centre out to tender in 2015 (£9.5 million project);
- Dunoon pre CARS bid feasibility work - £30k;
- Wooden Pier refurbishment start scheduled for 2015 (£2.85 million committed for Phase 1);
- Burgh Halls refurb and conversion to community arts centre;
- 17 affordable houses St. Cuthbert's - Fyne Homes development;
- Dunoon Sustrans upgrade to Esplanade on site – value £500k;
- Dunoon Primary school upgrade - £7 million investment;
- Dunoon new unit for children in need of care - £ 1 million investment;
- Ardynne pre planning scoping for aquaculture business site – multi million pound investment with HIE input;
- Sandbank industrial site new advanced offices on site –HIE/ERDF investment £1.9 million;
- Cairndow community forest buyout and MERK 1 MW hydro scheme under construction;
- Portavadie latest phase of development - £7 million plus spa, energy centre and workers accommodation on site with HIE input;
- Cowal Way upgrade 300k coastal communities fund;

I trust the above is helpful for you discussions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Sally Loudon', written in a cursive style.

Sally Loudon
Chief Executive

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Dick Walsh', written in a cursive style.

Dick Walsh
Leader