

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CONVERSATIONS ACROSS ARGYLL & BUTE

Cowal & Bute

Glendaruel Village Hall

22 February 2025

40 attendees



INTRODUCTION

In February 2025, 40 people gathered at Glendaruel Village Hall to take part in one of a series of *Food for Thought* events happening across Argyll and Bute. These conversations are part of a wider effort to shape a Sustainable Food Partnership for the region, putting community voices at the heart of decision-making around food systems, access, affordability, and resilience.

This report brings together the key themes and priorities that emerged throughout the day, capturing insights from local residents, producers, campaigners, and community groups.



SETTING THE SCENE



We began with a screening of *Rooted: Growing a Local Food Ecosystem* by Propagate, which offered a grounding introduction to the ways communities can build strong, sustainable food systems.

Following the film, a panel discussion brought together four local experts, each involved in different aspects of the food system:



Pam Brunton is a chef, author and campaigner. She co-owns Inver Restaurant and is an active voice in shaping sustainable food policy in Scotland.



Ed Pybus has supported community food growing for nearly two decades. He currently chairs the Kyles Allotment Group and consults on crofting development projects.



Michaela Blair manages a woodland smallholding in Argyll, combining organic growing and foraging. She also leads workshops at Cove Park.



Fiona Barge has run a diverse 60-hectare family farm for over 40 years. Her farm supports a micro dairy, sheep, poultry and vegetable production, alongside community and care-based initiatives.

Their perspectives helped spark wide-ranging conversations around current challenges and opportunities for food in Cowal and Bute.

KEY THEMES FROM THE GROUP DISCUSSION

The afternoon was spent in facilitated discussion sessions. Participants worked together to explore key areas affecting food systems in the region. While more structure could have helped focus these conversations, several strong themes emerged:

ACCESS TO LAND AND WATER

- Demand for more allotments
- Unlocking unused council land for growing
- Challenges securing leases
- Community-supported agriculture (CSA) models
- Interest in forest crofts and community-owned land
- Managing deer as a barrier to food growing
- Better use of existing walled gardens



INFRASTRUCTURE AND NETWORKS

- Improving logistics and access to markets for local produce
- Building a supportive trading environment for small producers
- Addressing challenges in distribution and transport
- Creating spaces for communities to connect around food
- Balancing convenience with sustainability



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Reducing food miles
- Sharing knowledge around sustainable practices
- Supporting biodiversity and improving soil health
- Minimising food waste and energy use
- The role of organic and regenerative farming

AFFORDABILITY AND EQUITY

- Tackling the perception that local food is a luxury
- Understanding barriers around affordability and access
- Considering subsidy structures and cost of production
- Addressing stigma around food support
- Transport challenges, particularly in rural areas
- Community transport and shared delivery models
- Ideas around bartering, food swaps, and informal sharing



EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Encouraging food and growing education in schools
- Preserving local food knowledge and skills
- Making space and time for learning and reconnection
- Understanding historical growing patterns and adapting to new climate realities



LOCAL FOOD HUBS

- A strong interest in developing one or more community food hubs
- Should be accessible on foot or spread across multiple locations
- Could include growing, bartering and community exchange
- Need for clearer targets and coordination
- Interest in CSA-style schemes and collective growing models

EMERGING PRIORITIES

Although we didn't formally ask participants to rank their priorities, some themes clearly stood out:

- Strong support for a local or mobile abattoir, addressing the current need to transport animals to Paisley
- Widespread interest in improving access to land for new and small-scale growers
- Calls for community food hubs to support distribution, affordability and local access
- Interest in exploring alternative economic models, such as bartering, co-ops and surplus redistribution



PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

We asked attendees what brought them to the event, and what they found most valuable. Here are a few responses:

Motivations for attending:

- “I want to find more of a food growing and land management network.”
- “Interested in food security, sustainability, and new ideas – including aquaculture.”
- “Want to see more affordable local food that doesn’t get exported.”
- “Joined-up thinking around food, transport, and community support.”



What people found valuable:

- “The discussion, sometimes we can be surprised as farmers. We need to understand the way people are thinking about food.”
- “Experiencing the goodwill towards a sustainable food system.”
- “Seeing how many people want to come together.”

NEXT STEPS

The ideas and priorities gathered in Glendaruel are feeding into a wider conversation across Argyll and Bute. They'll help shape the next stages in developing a Sustainable Food Partnership that's grounded in community insight and local action.

If you attended this event and would like to share further thoughts, or if you missed it and want to get involved, we'd love to hear from you.

Let's keep the conversation going.

Get in Touch

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