

**Argyll and Bute Planning Service**  
**Planning performance framework**  
**Annual report**  
**2012-2013**



**Seirbheis Planaidh Earra-Ghàidheal is Bhòid**  
**Frèam Coileanadh Planaidh**  
**Aithisg Bhliadhnail**  
**2012 - 2013**

Argyll and Bute Council  
Comhairle Earra-Ghàidheal agus Bhòid  
[www.argyll-bute.gov.uk](http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk)



## **Argyll and Bute: key facts**

690,899 hectares

89,590 population

2,603 kms of roads

47,000 households

25 inhabited islands

3,700 kms of coastline

Richest biodiversity in the UK

45% of population classed as remote rural

80% of people live within 1km of the coast

55% of all ferry journeys in Scotland start or finish in Argyll and Bute



## Planning performance and framework 2012-13

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# 1. About Argyll and Bute

## The Place

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute's natural environment, including our biodiversity, geodiversity, soils and landscapes, are all recognised by a wide range of stakeholders as being truly outstanding, both in diversity and quality. Argyll and Bute also enjoys a rich and immensely varied cultural and historic built heritage. Listed buildings, Scheduled Ancient monuments, vernacular architecture, planned villages, Victorian seaside towns, individual architectural masterpieces and abundant archaeology all make their unique contribution to our way of life that once lost cannot be replaced.

## The People

- 1.2 The area's population of 89,200 is spread across the second largest local authority area in Scotland and has the third sparsest population density, with an average population density of just 0.13 persons per hectare. 17% of Argyll and Bute's population live on our 25 inhabited islands, including Bute, Islay, Jura, Mull, Iona, Gigha and Tiree, more than any other local authority in Scotland. 45% live in settlements of 3,000 or more people; conversely, 55 % of Argyll and Bute's population live in settlements smaller than 3,000 people, or outwith settlements altogether.
- 1.3 The changing demographic profile of the area presents one of the area's greatest challenges. Over the next twenty-five year period from 2008, the proportion of 0-15 year olds is projected to fall by almost 14%, working age population by almost 14%, and the proportion of the population of pensionable age to increase by 20%. An estimated 15 % of jobs in Argyll and Bute are tourism-related. Service sector jobs account for 86 % of all employee jobs in Argyll and Bute, compared to 82 % across Scotland. 34 % of employee jobs in Argyll and Bute are in 'public administration, education and health'. This compares to 32% for Scotland as a whole.

## Our Key Planning Challenges

- **To create the best environment to enable sustainable economic growth** – allowing businesses, entrepreneurship and innovation to thrive without undermining our outstanding environment.
- **To reverse static and falling populations** – creating better places to live particularly for economically active families.
- **To meet our housing needs** – delivering a range of new housing in places where people want to live.
- **To improve our connectivity and deliver essential infrastructure** – making best use of what we have and targeting future investment to help optimise sustainable growth.

## 2. Introduction to the Argyll and Bute Planning Service

2.1 The Argyll and Bute Planning Service is an outward looking service which seeks to harness development opportunities, support existing and new businesses, protect the public and improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area by ensuring development takes place in a sustainable manner. The service is part of Development and Infrastructure Services (Planning and Regulatory Services, Economic Development, Roads and Amenity Services). The service in its current form has been operational from 1st April 2010 as part of the Council's Transformation/Modernisation Programme. We provide a range of services, including:-

- Consideration of planning applications and pre application advice;
- Enforcement and monitoring of performance/outcomes on the ground;
- Formulation of planning policy and supplementary guidance:

### Development Management

2.2 The Development Management Service determines planning applications and undertakes necessary enforcement to ensure that proposed new developments support the council's single outcome agreement and community plan, the council's development plan and national planning policies.

2.3 The Development Management Service also provides free pre-application and validation advice including on the appropriateness of new development and negotiates planning agreements to deliver affordable housing and, where appropriate, other benefits to mitigate the impact of new developments on the local environment and community.

### Planning Policy

2.4 The Planning Policy Service prepares the spatial strategy and planning policies for regeneration and change, conservation and development in Argyll and Bute. We provide information and advice for residents, businesses, consultants and other interested people on our planning policies. Other services include:

- Preparing detailed evidence about a wide range of issues such as housing, employment, retail, transport and sustainability.
- Assisting the regeneration of our built heritage and town centres through CHORD including assisting in the implementation of Campbeltown and Rothesay THIs and Inveraray CARs.
- Facilitating the development of Masterplans in key areas that have significant growth potential such as Dunbeg, Ardyne, Bowmore and Helensburgh.
- Assisting in the delivery of essential infrastructure through initiatives such as the Lorn TIF and the Maritime Change Project.
- Monitoring outcomes on the ground through our Annual Housing Audit and by-annual LDP Action Programme.



## Service Performance

- 2.5 The Argyll and Bute Planning Service has a strong commitment to managing performance and this is clearly demonstrated with the publication of the annual Service Plan, annual improvement plans that are submitted to the Scottish Government and COSLA, regular audit and reviews such as Public Sector Improvement Framework (completed in 2010 and 2012 with a proposed refresh in 2014). The link to the **Single Outcome Agreement and Community Plan** together with Key Performance Indicators contained in Pyramid (Argyll and Bute Council's performance management system) are also included within the planning service's business objectives and monitored on a quarterly basis at Executive level and by the council's scrutiny committee.
- 2.6 The Planning Service has performed well in recent years by consistently meeting or exceeding national and local targets for performance over which it has control. This has been achieved despite a reduction in available budgets and a continued need for significant change instigated initially through the Scottish Government's Planning Modernisation agenda and now through the Council's own Transformation / Modernisation agenda that is now entering a further period of service prioritisation.
- 2.7 The on-going economic downturn and consequential reduction in both private and public finance is a further challenge the service continues to face. With a focus on delivering sustainable economic growth the service recognises the compelling need to retain a core of skilled and competent workforce with sufficient capability, flexibility together with the necessary skills to embrace new working practices and increased workloads.

## Processes and Systems

- 2.8 The planning service has invested heavily in recent years, with some financial assistance by the Scottish Government, in its processes, systems and technical equipment in an effort to deliver greater efficiency, transparency, speed and consistency in decision making together with better outcomes on the ground. This investment continues with initiatives such as e planning, the creation of virtual teams, the introduction of customer contact points and single contact number, the introduction of agile and flexible working practices, the introduction of a comprehensive electronic document management system, processing agreements and time recording for all planning staff.
- 2.9 This investment coupled with better and more targeted training for staff, the embedding of performance management in the ethos of the service, in line with national and council expectations, and a continuous review and audit programme has helped raise performance levels and drive down costs by 25% as a result of the 2011 Planning Services Service Review and subsequent additional savings required by the council. The Planning Service is also aware that the journey of improvement it has embarked on needs to continue as budget pressures intensify and further savings are required to meet decreasing budgets. In 2013 a particular emphasis has been placed on leadership development and training for the service's three managers (HOPS / Improvement Service Leading for Outcomes, Argyll and Bute Manager / Leader Development Programme).

## National Headline Indicators (NHIs)

Key outcomes	2012-2013	2011-2012
<b>Development Planning:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>age of local/strategic development plan(s) (full years) <i>Requirement: less than 5 years</i></li> <li>development plan scheme: on track? (Y/N)</li> </ul>	<p><b>4 years</b></p> <p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>3 years</b></p> <p><b>Y</b></p>
<b>Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effective housing land: years supply</li> <li>effective housing land supply</li> <li>housing approvals</li> <li>effective employment land supply</li> <li>employment land take-up</li> <li>effective commercial floor space supply</li> <li>commercial floor space delivered</li> </ul>	<p><b>5 years</b> <b>4,492 units</b> <b>672 units</b></p> <p><b>88.6 ha</b> <b>0.57ha*</b></p> <p><b>4,370m2</b> <b>Unavailable</b></p>	<p><b>5 years</b> <b>4,130 units</b> <b>730 units</b></p> <p><b>70ha</b> <b>0.3 ha</b></p> <p><b>Unavailable</b> <b>6,367m2</b></p>
<b>Development Management</b> <b>Project Planning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>percentage of applications subject to pre-application advice</li> <li>number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan</li> <li>percentage planned timescales met</li> </ul> <b>Decision-making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>application approval rate</li> <li>delegation rate</li> </ul>	<p><b>18.4%</b></p> <p><b>None</b></p> <p><b>n/a</b></p> <p><b>95.7%</b> <b>95.4%</b></p>	<p><b>2.2%</b></p> <p><b>None</b></p> <p><b>n/a</b></p> <p><b>95.6%</b> <b>94.7%</b></p>
<b>Decision-making timescales</b> Average number of weeks to decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>major developments</li> <li>local developments (non-householder)</li> <li>householder developments</li> </ul>	<p><b>88.2</b></p> <p><b>14.0</b></p> <p><b>8.9</b></p>	<p><b>94.3</b></p> <p><b>16.8</b></p> <p><b>9.1</b></p>
<b>Enforcement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>time since enforcement charter published / reviewed (months) <i>Requirement: review every 2 years</i></li> <li>number of breaches identified / resolved</li> </ul>	<p><b>7 months/ 7 months</b></p> <p><b>275/185</b></p>	<p><b>47 months / 1 month</b></p> <p><b>No data recorded</b></p>
<p>Our approval rate and delegation rate have remained consistently high around the 95% mark which highlights our keenness to make development happen and officers implementing our Development Plan in the vast majority of cases. Ensuring that a plan led system is at the heart of our service is also reflected in the high percentage of original decisions being upheld at both review and appeal. The 'average week timescales' for Local Developments and Householder Developments is likely to be comparable with other similar sized local authorities at 14 weeks, a significant reduction from <b>16.8</b> weeks in the last PPF and <b>8.9</b> weeks respectively again a reduction from <b>9.1</b> weeks.</p> <p><b>59.8%</b> of Local Developments and <b>86.9%</b> of Householder developments were determined within the statutory timescale. It is recognised that the timescale to determine Major Applications of 88.2 weeks is still high in part due to legacy applications still being recorded on the system but also reflects the complexity of the few major applications that are currently being dealt with.</p>		

### 3. Defining and measuring a high-quality planning service

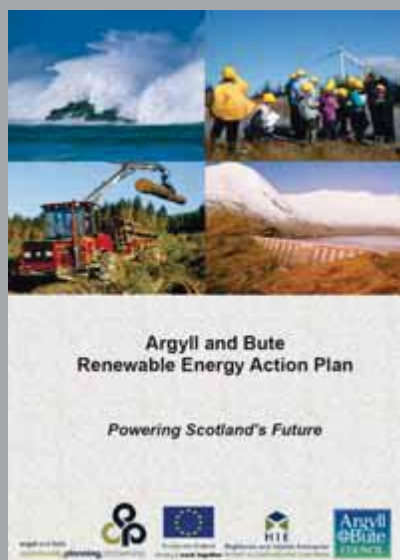
#### Open for business

- 3.1 Argyll and Bute Planning Service has placed the delivery of sustainable economic growth as a top priority in line with both the councils and the Scottish Government's key strategic documents. The Planning Service works closely with the Economic Development Service that shares the same Directorate, to ensure that key council strategic documents are fully integrated to address key challenges and take advantage of competitive advantages in industries such as tourism, food and drink including aquaculture and whisky together with renewables.
- 3.2 A key aspect of this collaboration has been the renewal of the council's Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP) (insert link) that has aligned itself to the Single Outcome Agreement and the Proposed Local Development Plan spatial strategy. Work is now continuing on economic area based plans through a series of workshops hosted jointly with economic development and the planning policy service with an emphasis on delivering future sustainable economic growth throughout Argyll and Bute.
- 3.3 A key planning challenge facing our area is a lack of key essential infrastructure in places with greatest growth potential but lacking the necessary economies of scale to enable action. The Planning Service is working in partnership with the Economic Development Service of the Council to help deliver the Lorn Arc Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) Business Case that includes proposals to finance strategic road, port and site access infrastructure to enable the sustainable growth of general business, Marine Science, Marine Tourism, Aquaculture and Renewable Energy in the Oban and Lorn area and beyond. The TIF, if approved by The Scottish Government, will allow Argyll and Bute Council to borrow circa £18.6M for infrastructure investment and retain additional Non Domestic Rates (NDR) generated within an agreed boundary over a 25yr period to re-pay the loans.

#### Case Study – Open for Business - Argyll and Bute Strategic Housing and Communities Forum

The Strategic Housing and Communities Forum is a multi-member partnership that includes the Council's planning policy service that has continued to deliver an innovative and exciting housing programme in challenging economic circumstances. Top priorities have been: - to sustain housing development, and to address fuel poverty. Housing developers in Argyll and Bute responded creatively to the Scottish Government's invitation to bid for funding from the Innovation and Investment Fund. In total 7 bids were successful securing £5m grant funding to deliver 137 affordable homes over the next two years. Currently there are 172 affordable homes on site in Argyll and Bute including the recent completion of the new Mull Progressive Care Centre in Craginure, an innovative joint project between health, housing and social work facilitated by the current Development Plan. For more information on housing in Argyll and Bute visit – <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/housing-Castle-Street,-Rothesay> .





## Case Study – Open for Business – Argyll and Bute Renewables Alliance (ABRA)

The Argyll and Bute Renewables Alliance (ABRA) was developed from a key action identified in the Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP). ABRA brings together key partners including Argyll and Bute Council (Planning and Economic Service), Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Government, Marine Scotland, Scottish Power Renewables, Scottish and Southern Energy, Crown Estate Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage and Skills Development Scotland. ABRA ensures a strategic overview of renewable development together with a greater awareness of all the issues relating to this form of development across Argyll and Bute and Scotland, as well as assist with

implementation of the REAP. Partners help identify options for coordinated and joined up discussions between public and private sectors, to allow for alignment of partner plans, objectives and future investment, to realise collective requirements in order to overcome barriers to development and maximise the opportunities presented by this important industry for the future economic success of Argyll and Bute.

For more information on the Renewable Energy Action Plan visit – <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/planningand-environment-renewable-energy-action-plan>.

## Case Study – Open for Business - Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (AICCT)

The concept of the Trust came about following council budget decisions and the outcomes of the Planning Services Review. The review demonstrated a clear need from key stakeholders of the service that we had to look at mitigating the loss of some non-statutory functions by taking a more innovative approach to service delivery using the voluntary sector if possible. There was also a growing recognition that Argyll and Bute was losing out in terms of environmental funding opportunities to our competitors in the rest of Scotland and beyond.

A partnership was subsequently formed with the likes of SNH, FC, NHS Highland and ABSEN to test the feasibility of creating a trust or similar body with funding secured to employ STAR consultants to do the work.

The full findings of the feasibility study are included here <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/argyll-and-isles-coast-and-countryside-trust> and shows strong community support for establishing the Trust provided we took account of some key concerns which we have now put in place.

The Trust is about attracting additional external funding and delivering better outcomes on the ground. Outcomes that local people and visitors to Argyll and Bute want to see happen and have the potential to help grow the tourism industry and open up opportunities for healthy living.

The intention with the Trust is to start small and demonstrate its value each year. Core funding has been agreed with our partners (Forestry Commission, SNH, NHS Highland) with significant potential for additional project funding to come forward.

## **Case Study – Open for Business - Site Selection Process with Babcock Marine**

As part of Maritime Change Programme the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Babcock Marine have identified the need for an International Submarine Training Facility within 30mins drive of HMNB Clyde - Faslane. This facility has the potential to provide upwards of 100 jobs to the local area plus adding a significant number of students. The project is still in its early stages of inception however the Planning Service were highly proactive (in a competitive market with other Local Authorities) in assisting the site selection process. In total 7 sites across the Helensburgh and Lomond Area were identified and scored using a criteria based approach to select 'preferred options'. Matters such as visual impact, accessibility, designations, security, land use zoning, flood risk, contamination and ownership were all considered. Babcock Marine have been grateful for the proactive pre-application work undertaken by planning staff and are currently considering their options. (link to document).

## **Case Study – Open For Business - Hydro-scheme at Blarghour Farm, East Lochaweside**

### **(Minimising Environmental and Visual Impact and Working to deadlines)**

This hydro scheme at Blarghour Farm, East Lochaweside is currently under construction. Once finished it will provide 995kw of electricity and has assisted in diversifying the income streams to Blarghour Farm together with other renewable energy projects and a holiday letting accommodation. The application was accompanied by a formal Environmental Statement as per Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations and was determined within 4 months. A subsequent application to amend the pipe line was approved allowing the applicant to avoid taking the pipeline uphill thus losing pressure and reducing output. Through joint working a suitable route was discussed and subsequently approved which limited visual impact and loss of habitat.

The planning conditions were quickly discharged allowing the applicant to commence works on site and maintain their strict development timetable. The developer, through their strong working relationship with the planning service, provides regular updates and has provided accompanied site visits for those officers new to hydro schemes. It is a positive example of joint working to improve the understanding of development economics and the relationship between the planning authority and developer.



**Watercourse prior to development  
Blarghour Farm, East Lochaweside**



- 3.4 The service continues to adopt a culture of negotiation, improvement where necessary and approval rather than refusal. This ethos is reflected in our pre application advice protocol and consistently high approval rates in excess of 95%.
- 3.5 The current Development Plan is growth orientated and contains 135 allocations for business, mixed use, housing and minerals together with 178 potential development areas for a variety of uses. This theme is being enhanced through the emerging Proposed Local Development Plan that has completed its final period of public consultation.
- 3.6 Key officers have been trained in Prince 2 (project management methodology) to help facilitate the decision making process from pre – application advice to post decision and implementation stages. Development Management operate a free formal pre-application service called 'Firm Foundations' which seeks to start every project on the right footing. Officers seek to work in partnership with developers and iron out potential conflicts or issues at as early as stage possible before too much capital is committed. We are monitored on speed of responding to pre-application enquiries and seek to correspond within 20 working days. Our officers attend site visits, video conferences, office meetings and communicate via phone or email to suit the needs of the customer and project.
- 3.7 Major applications are prioritised within the service through a dedicated major applications team which can utilise support from locally based development management officers together with planning policy officers and other council officers as appropriate.
- 3.8 We seek to ensure our customers are directed to the most appropriate officer as quickly as possible to deal with their query or pre-application proposal and have suitably graded officers to appropriately respond to them. Our Technical Officers have detailed understanding of Permitted Development legislation and householder policies and are therefore first point of contact for the general public. Officers and Senior Officers deal with the more complex applications that require more detailed scrutiny and assessment.
- 3.9 On major projects the service convenes a 'case conference' or sets up working groups where the applicant and other key stakeholders such as the Roads and Amenity Service, Environmental Health, Transport Scotland, industry representatives all sit down and discuss the merits and issues both for the single application and the wider context.

- 3.10 Planning Gain requirements are clearly specified through the current Development Plan and emerging Local Development Plan with an emphasis on providing essential infrastructure and appropriate levels of developer contribution linked to clearly identified local needs such as affordable housing.
- 3.11 The service has also published a customer service charter that puts the customer first in terms of service delivery with clear targets set in terms of engagement.



Community Wind turbine, element of Allt Dearg, Wind Farm Ardrishaig



## 4. Creating High Quality Development on the Ground

- 4.1 The Planning Service places great emphasis on the quality of outcomes on the ground either through coordinated area regeneration schemes in towns such as Campbeltown, Rothesay and Inveraray, larger scale housing developments, or strategic business sites down to individual house sites. In many cases design improvements to schemes happen at the pre application stage and masterplans, together with associated design statements, are now a key requirement for many of our larger development sites.
- 4.2 The current Development Plan and emerging Local Development Plan contain detailed policies of expected design standards together with a suite of award winning sustainable design guides that deal with small and larger scales of development, design and our heritage and incorporating renewable technologies. The latest guide concerns the siting of on shore wind turbines which has been a partnership project with SNH.
- 4.3 The service has also established a design forum that aims to promote good design at a community level including the hosting of our Argyll and Bute Sustainable Design competition that is held every two years
- 4.4 The service seeks to 'add value' to every proposal they determine when appropriate by improving design, orientation and siting in partnership with the applicant. We use negotiation techniques, our unique Area Capacity Evaluation (ACE) tool and our Council Design Guides and design policies to improve the quality of development on the ground.
- 4.5 We deliver Development Management from area based offices to ensure a professional knowledge with the area is built up and officers appreciate local buildings styles, settlement patterns, materials and history so new proposals integrate with the existing locale.



## Argyll and Bute Sustainable Design Competition Overall Winner – Tigh-na-Cladach, Dunoon



**Architect – G Deveci Chartered Architect**

**Category – Large scale residential**

The Argyll and Bute Design Awards are intended to recognise, promote and celebrate examples of exceptional design quality within both an urban and rural context across the whole of the Argyll and Bute Council Planning Area. The Awards provides a means of stimulating greater public awareness of good design and establish good examples on the ground. Following a public vote and then consideration from a panel of judges an overall winner was chosen together with 5 commendations. The winning entries can all be seen here:-

<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/sustainable-design-awards-2012-winners>

**Judges' comments** –*“Given the tight and awkward site, together with the seaward setting and the context of shore side frontage, this development is exceptional in its manifestation. That the development is social housing with low energy design, including "passivehaus" standards, within such budget constraints, makes the development all the more remarkable. These factors along with the high quality architectural response have resulted in a development which has set a high benchmark for future affordable housing, and important lesson for private housing developers on how new housing can be successfully developed. The continuing community involvement with the Bullwood Group and the establishment of a new neighbourhood through careful design reflect the social inclusion values of the developer.”*

*“This development is unanimously decided to be the most outstanding amongst a strong and varied competition. It is considered that Tigh Na Cladach sets an unmatched example of exceptional design in terms of response to the site and setting, building performance and architectural solutions in the context of social housing budget constraints.”*

## Case Study – Creating high quality development – New Food store at entrance to Helensburgh



New food store, Helensburgh

The new food store will form a gateway entrance to Helensburgh from the east. Following pre application discussion and negotiation a bespoke high quality design was derived for this important gateway site. The use of canopies, structural framing and massing have all been used to signify a main entrance point to Argyll and Bute's largest town.

Natural materials such as stone and timber have been used to reflect both the surrounding context and local vernacular. The linear form of the building is supplemented by a landscape strip giving an active frontage onto the main road into Helensburgh. This is further balanced by the recent Hermitage Academy development across the road. In addition to this high quality bespoke design, a substantial level of planning obligation monies have been secured in order to address and mitigate against departures from the development plan. The planning obligation money is focused in three main areas, namely Impact on town centre, loss of open spaces and loss of business land.



New food store, Helensburgh

The 25,000 square feet new retail building and petrol station is scheduled to open on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 with the creation of 200 new jobs.

## Case Study – Creating high quality development - New Council Office Development,

This flagship project for the Council was the subject of highly detailed and complex pre application discussion with planning, Historic Scotland, Roads and the Council's in house architects. During the pre-application stage improvements to the design of the extension focussed particularly on the north facing elevation and in particular to the link between the Listed Building and the new extension.

This proposal which will provide new offices for 139 Argyll and Bute Council staff will bring many benefits to the town. This town centre development will bring a dilapidated category B Listed Building back into sustainable use that was placed on the buildings at risk register for over a decade, creating a high quality landscaped open space which capitalises on its coastal location on the Firth of Clyde.

A multi-functional space it will bring people and activity into Helensburgh's Town Centre and it will create a Hub for the community as it includes a cafe and community space. This proposal is now on site with a completion date programmed for 2015.



Former East Clyde Street  
Community Centre,  
Helensburgh







## Case study - Cross departmental working – ‘At Risk’ Buildings Group

The poor economic climate and harsh winters endured in Argyll and Bute has taken its toll on an increasing number of buildings in our towns and villages. Lack of maintenance and investment by private building owners is evident in a number of areas. Poorly maintained, vacant, derelict or dangerous buildings can have a profound negative effect on the attractiveness of our built environment as well as the health and wellbeing of our communities. Lack of intervention may also result in significant financial burden upon the Council if CPO, direct action or demolition is required through years of neglect.

Stemming from a series of reoccurring common complaints 4 ‘At Risk’ Building Groups have been set up across Argyll and Bute’s administration areas. These groups meet on a quarterly basis and consist of locally based Planning Officers, Empty Homes Officers, Conservation Officers, Building Standards Officers, Environmental Health Officers, Social Work and Private Sector Housing Officers.

The Groups share knowledge, experience and skills to address common complaints about poorly maintained buildings. The Groups seeks to identify joint intervention strategies using combined legislation such as: - Housing (Scotland) Act 2006: Works order Tenement Scotland Act 2004: Section 49 Urgent works Planning and Listed Building Act: Section 87 Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 to achieve the best outcome. Joint correspondence is issued to building owners and in certain circumstances Grants have been offered to set up Tennant Associations as an incentive to address repairs issues.

This is an example of recent cross departmental working that is solution focussed and makes best use of Council resource and legislation available to deliver a common goal to benefit of our communities.



13 -15 Kirk Street, Campbeltown (completed)

### **Saving a Building at Risk**

**13 -15 Kirk Street, Campbeltown** - a key target building identified as part of the Campbeltown THI initiative that had blighted the street for many years. The Planning Service working with our colleagues in Economic Development together with a private developer to acquire the building and refurbish it to high conservation standard to form four flats for rent in the town centre. Brought back to a productive life this category B listed building was officially opened by Mike Russel MSP on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2013.



## Case Study - Shared Projects and Policy – Signage Strategy with Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park and Landscape Capacity Work with Highland Council

It is acknowledged that there are an increasing number of unauthorised signs along road corridors, on pavements and attached to street furniture in both our towns and rural areas. Elected Members have also questioned current Council policy / protocol when dealing with them and have sought that a proportionate approach be adopted in each scenario.

In response, Officers have proposed a new strategy for dealing with rural signage, signage in towns and obstructions on footpaths to ensure a consistent approach is adopted. Being aware this is a common concern across boundaries Officers from Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park have been involved in early project development and a joint Project Inception Document (PID) has been produced for both Authorities to deliver a joint strategy. <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s77627/Signage%20PID%20FINAL%20VERSION.pdf>

Local businesses are operating in difficult economic circumstances and both LLTNP and ABC seek to deliver a strategy that balances business needs along with obligations of the Council to ensure pedestrian / traffic safety and to protect the visual appearance of our area. Whilst it is appreciated that signs, especially in rural areas, are necessary for businesses to operate we cannot accept signs appearing without consent and those which are of an unsuitable scale, location or design. Likewise, banners, A-Boards and merchandise which traverse across public footpaths (pavements) or attached to street furniture in our towns also have potential to cause trip hazards to the public or damage property as well as their intended advertisement purpose. Provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA), Town & Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 all must be given weighting by the authorities in drawing up this new strategy.

The initial meetings of this Group have taken place and have included representation from ABC, LLTNP and Transport Scotland. Stirling Council has also attended and may seek to enter into the joint strategy in the future. The project aim and project plan are still being developed but an output is expected in 2014. There are a number of different organisations that shall form the partnership in the coming months including the Roads Department, Tourism Wardens, Communications Team Transport Scotland, Economic Development, Visit Scotland and the Local Chambers of Commerce.

Argyll and Bute Council planning Service is also working in partnership with The Highland Council to deliver 4 landscape capacity studies for onshore windfarm development. This project involved a joint bid with Highland Council to secure Scottish Government funds to examine cumulative landscape impacts in pressured areas for new on shore wind farms. The work, which is being carried out by LUC Consultants has been funded by the Scottish Government and is set for completion in November 2013. Once the studies have been completed joint landscape capacity training shall be delivered to both Councils key planning officers by the consultants involved.

## Case Study – Creating high quality development – Affordable Housing, Park Square, Campbeltown

This development of 32 affordable residential units for rent is on a brownfield site in the centre of Campbeltown. Its particular location presented significant challenges for the applicants and the planners to overcome. With one side facing the Conservation Area and historic environment of the tenements on Longrow and the other facing the open space of Kinloch Park; it was extremely important that these units were designed in a way which respected both of these elements. Additionally, the risk of flooding on this site and amended road layout represented major constraints to be overcome in the Development Management process. As a key gateway site there was a particular emphasis given to the quality of the design and use of materials such as natural slate.

Planners also assisted with the development of parking and landscaping proposals and most importantly resolution of flood prevention issues which at one point threatened to derail the proposal entirely by requiring extensive raising of the land above street level. Officers negotiated amended site and floor levels as a compromise from the FPA to allow acceptance of the proposal having demonstrated an unfavourable comparison with risk to existing development in the surrounds.

The Council as part of its CHORD town centre regeneration initiative provided additional funds to allow higher quality materials to be used with further inspiration and influence being drawn from the Scottish Government's 'Designing Streets' guidance.

This development was officially opened by the First Minister in September 2013 and represents an outstanding example of modern social housing built in the right location and delivering a real sense of place at a key gateway location.

**Alastair MacGregor, Chief Executive of ACHA**, commented: *"I am delighted that the First Minister has been able to open our new development today and see the real value of investing in affordable homes. This development is about homes, jobs and the wider regeneration of Campbeltown and we are really proud of this. Today would*



Park Square, Campbeltown

*not have happened unless ACHA, the Scottish Government and Argyll & Bute Council brought their resources together in partnership. What we see today has come through the sum of our parts. The completion of Park Terrace brings to 120 the number of new and refurbished homes the Association has provided in the centre of Campbeltown since 2009."*

## Case Study Creating high quality development – Burns Brae, Lochgilphead

Extensive pre-application discussions took place between the applicants and the Development Management Service on this major housing project which incorporates over 100 residential units with 90% being classed as affordable.

The finalised design which gained planning permission and is now nearing completion was subject to a number of design and layout changes which the Development Management team negotiated in order to present a development with a less 'urban-style' of density and design. It was extremely important that the proposed units were sensitive to their location on the edge of a rural settlement and the applicant and the planners worked together to achieve the desired outcome. Additionally, in negotiating amendments to the layout of the site, the Development Management team ensured that the development of adjacent land remained viable and therefore protected future development opportunities.

This significant development for Lochgilphead has drawn praise from the new residents, the wider local community and Scottish Ministers.



*The development of 101 new homes was so impressive it should be used as an inspiration by other local authorities”* **Margaret Burgess (Housing Minister)**





**First Minister opening Jaeger factory site, Campbeltown with “grow our own planning staff” and local apprentices**

## **Case Study – Creating high quality development - (Open for Business)**

Another development which was recently opened by the First Minister, the first phase of the proposed 21 light industrial workshops has been completed on a brown field site in Campbeltown supported financially by HIE.

In a location which had previously been the subject of numerous pre-application enquiries, and with potentially contaminated site adjacent to a gasworks, the Development Management Service worked hard to ensure that a viable use could be found for the site. With a clear need for affordable workshop units within Campbeltown and a developer keen to deliver them, extensive pre-application work proved fruitful in delivering these units that were pre let at highly affordable lets to small businesses with a waiting list for more.

In a location which had previously been the subject of numerous pre-application enquiries, and with potentially contaminated site adjacent to a gasworks, the Development Management Service worked hard to ensure that a viable use could be found for the site. With a clear need for affordable workshop units within Campbeltown and a developer keen to deliver them, extensive pre-application work proved fruitful in delivering these units that were pre let at highly affordable lets to small businesses with a waiting list for more in an employment deficit area.



**New small business units former Jaeger factory site.**

## 5. Certainty

### Consistency of advice, process and decision-making

- 5.1 Our Officers aim to provide consistent and pragmatic advice to all customers from pre-application to final decision. The suite of area and topic based policies in the plan provides considerable certainty in the decision making process which allows officers to bring forward proposals through negotiation and general discussion with applicants. There is a low departure rate from the plan at 3% given the robustness of policy with a current 95.7% approval rate. In addition to the certainty obtained from consistent officer advice we also have a 100% appeal record for the original decisions being upheld and 70% from the Local Review Board (LRB).
- 5.2 To ensure customers have a clear understanding of what we expect from them we have developed a Validation Checklist so the appropriate scale of plans, supporting documentation and surveys can be prepared in advance of submission.
- 5.3 The current up to date Development Plan seeks to provide certainty in the decision making process through the use of a zoned approach linked to clearly identifiable criteria for different forms of development. This approach is continued in the proposed Local Development Plan with a simplification of the zoning system and a reduction of core policies to 11 from the 75 that were contained in the current Structure Plan and Local Plan.

### Case Study – Creating Certainty - Introduction of processing agreements

The Argyll and Bute Planning Service has commenced the use of Processing Agreements in 2013. Three Processing Agreements have now been signed and are being implemented. Our partners have been Hydroplan and the Ministry of Defence. Other PAs are on the cusp of being signed with a number of Aquaculture operators.

#### Processing Agreements with the MoD

- In 2013 the MoD sought to invest £4.25m on housing, open space, infrastructure improvements by end of year.
- 2 distinct areas of work at Upper Churchill, Helensburgh and McKenzie Estate in Rhu
- 70 existing properties to be brought up to 'modern and improved' standards to assist in making Argyll and Bute an attractive option for families moving up from England to work on new T-Class submarine project.
- 70 existing properties to be brought up to 'modern and improved' standards to assist in making Argyll and Bute an attractive option for families moving up from England to work on new T-Class submarine project.
- Around 10 properties that have been vacant for 8 years shall be brought back into use
- From initial pre-application meeting to scheduled build there was only 10-week timeframe to access relevant funding scheme
- Processing agreement was welcomed by all parties to deliver project on time



## Value of PA

In this scenario the PA was useful to both the council and customer as required milestones were imperative to achieve funding criteria by the MoD. The project could be mapped through to consent including site visits, advertising, committee dates and discharge of conditions so work could commence on site by the required date.

## Experience of PA

Argyll and Bute has not completed many PAs due to very small number of major applications being submitted at present. We have however been rolling them out to more significant local applications and in scenarios such as the MoD applications where the customer is working to very tight / stringent timescales in order to release grant funding by a certain date. In practice however applicants and developers have been reluctant to enter into the process due to unfamiliarity or that they consider them to be superfluous as the speed of decision is not their primary goal.

## Case Study – Creating certainty through the application of GIS

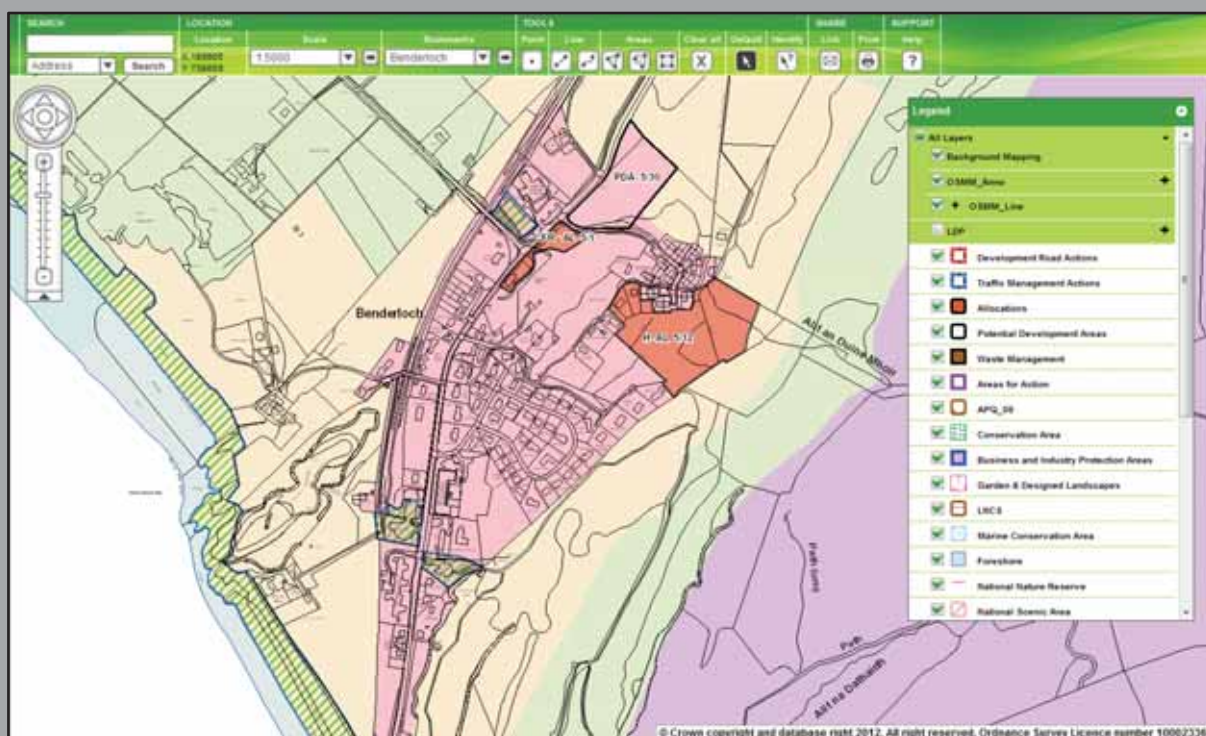
With the transfer of the council's GIS team to the Planning Policy Service in 2013 there has been a greater focus on using GIS tools for analyse and interrogation of Local Development Plan data. Development Policy officers now have the option of accessing the LDP in the ArcGIS desktop software or the Local View web GIS. Training has been provided to all Development Policy staff to enable them gain benefit from the GIS systems available and select the right GIS tool for the task.

The GIS proved particularly valuable for neighbour notification, using the buffering of policies to select properties falling within the site or the buffer and, through a link to the Corporate Address Gazetteer, identifying all the properties to be notified



Map 1 – Neighbour Notification using ArcGIS

The deployment of LocalView has opened up access to the current Local Plan for Development Management staff and other officers across the council who need to interrogate the Plan

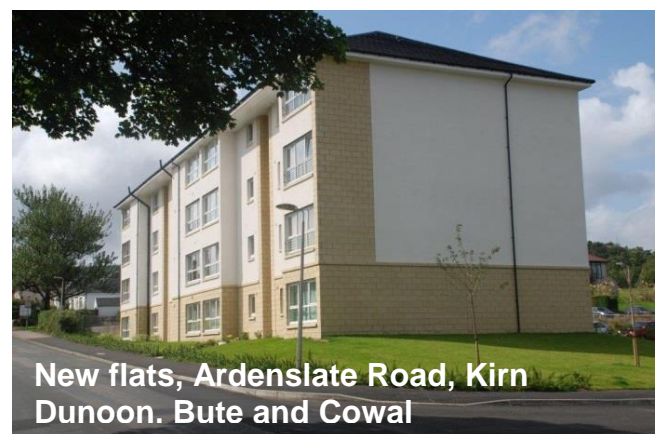


## Map 2 – The adopted Local Plan in LocalView

In the preparation of the new Local Development Plan, usable and robust GIS data has been considered from an early stage in the plan cycle and developed with useful attributes which ensure amendments can be tracked and carried out with a minimal data manipulation.

Following the transfer of the GIS team to the Planning Service in 2013 the team have consistently reached the gold standard and consequently have been shortlisted for the “Most Improved Scottish Gazetteer” category at the UK Geo Place Exemplar Awards to be held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2013.





## 6. Communications, engagement and customer service

### Communications strategy for engagement and positive customer experience

- 6.1 The Planning Service remains fully committed to being a customer focussed service that delivers high quality outcomes on the ground. Key stakeholder expectations are identified and regularly updated through the use of focus groups, the web, individual customer feedback forms, open days and regular communication events with specific groups.
- 6.2 A customer service charter has been published that puts the customer first in terms of service delivery with clear targets set in terms of engagement. This document also contains information on how complaints are dealt with together with a complaints procedure that is available on our website and leaflets at our office reception areas. Complaints are investigated thoroughly and outcomes are communicated directly to the complainant. Complaints and other enquiries are analysed to ensure that service improvements can be made where appropriate. All our documentation is available in alternative formats or language and is subject to testing for the use of plain English. A key performance improvement this year has been customer care training for all planning staff which has now been completed.

### Case Study – Improving Customer Service – Stakeholder forums

In October 2012, joint annual Development Management and Building Standards User Forum took place to engage with regular customers and users of the Service.

Over 40 Architects, Agents, Builders, MSPs, Councillors and applicants attended the 4 sessions which were held in Helensburgh, Dunoon, Lochgilphead and Oban.

At each Forum a presentation was given by the Council to reflect upon annual performance, service review implications, legislative changes and to flag up any future challenges. Thereafter, a structured discussion took place to obtain customer feedback. Customer Feedback forms were issued at the end of these meetings and a 17 point action plan was formed by Development Management in response to certain comments.

The service produces an annual information consultation and engagement plan (ICE) as an integral part of the service planning process.

In line with Scottish Government expectations the planning service is moving to on-line delivery with 50% of applications currently being submitted through the e-planning portal. Comprehensive customer information on a wide range of planning services can also be found on our council website including the ability to search for all planning applications, appeals and enforcement actions.

## Case Study – Improving Customer Service – Placing the Customer at the heart of service delivery

Every decision notice that we issue is accompanied with a customer satisfaction form which we request is filled in and sent back to provide feedback on how our customers perceive our service. Our customer satisfaction levels have increased from 67% in FQ1 2011/2012 to **90.2%** in FQ4 2012/2013.

In addition to our mainstream customer satisfaction survey we also hold User Forums and Focus Groups with agents and architects so we can obtain verbal feedback, exchange ideas, tackle issues and ultimately shape the service for our most frequent customers. User forum topics have included validation requirements, increasing the use of e-planning and affordable housing policy. Examples of both good and bad comments are listed below and what we did to address them.

### **2013 Customer Quotes on User Forums:-**

We are pleased to have the opportunity to meet Martin (Building Standards Manger) and Ross (Development Manager) and to have constructive, full and frank discussions. Progress is being made in improving the level of service A&B provide’.

***Jim Lough – Partner at Hay Lough David***

‘The forum was very interesting and informative. Worthwhile attending and it seemed to work combining both planning and Building Standards. ‘

***Douglas Galloway – Architect***

‘Guidance for planning validation is not great as the validation teams requirements seem to vary from application to application. Helensburgh planners are good communicators but other parts of Argyll are not. ‘

***Marie-Claire Harvey – Organic Architects***

**NOTE:-** In response to Marie-Claire Harvey’s comments a Focus Group has been set up to review our validation check list. This review shall also be reported to Heads of Planning Scotland Development Management Sub group.

## Case Study – Improving Customer Service – Community Council Training

Community Council training and consultation events are also held throughout Argyll and Bute where staff seek to provide the community councillors with a ‘toolkit’ to get involved in planning and good practice techniques how to make a representation and manage their resource. The service also offers regular training events for our key stakeholders including community representatives. , A recent and successful example of this approach was the holding of an all-day seminar with community groups, renewable energy firms agents and representatives together with elected members on the new on shore wind landscape capacity study and design guide. This seminar was facilitated by council staff and the authors of the study.



## Case Study – Improving Customer Service – Early Engagement with Communities – Isle of Colonsay Fish Farm

Development Management were involved in pre-application discussion with Marine Harvest for the development of a 12 cage fish farm (Marine Harvest) and installation of feed barge at Rubha Garbh, NE of Scalasaig, Isle of Colonsay.

Development Management strongly advised that Marine Harvest – who was a new aquaculture developer in Argyll and Bute – undertake pre-application engagement with the local community prior to the submission of their application. This consultation process was not statutory (as it was not a major application) but the style and format was similar to the PAC process. It had been the experience of Development Management staff over recent years (especially in Island communities) that significant benefits resulted from early engagement such as clarification of facts, explanation of non-planning related benefits, project amendments and identifying key contacts. Marine Harvest facilitated a referendum for Islanders where 110 of the 121 eligible residents cast votes with 67 casting in favour of the development going ahead ( 60.9% ) .

The 91% turnout referendum and general support was echoed once the formal planning application was submitted. Not a single letter of objection was received, which is the first time on record in Argyll and Bute for a large aquaculture site and the application was swiftly determined through delegated powers. This new development will provide much needed permanent jobs on the island helping to sustain and grow its population with the company also planning to build 3 new houses for additional workers.



**Proposed cages Rubha Garbh, NE of Scalasaig, Isle of Colonsay**

“Marine Harvest recently applied for planning permission to install a new fish farm off the Isle of Colonsay. The planning permission determination process was performed timely and fairly and the planning staff were available to give advice at all steps of the process. Marine Harvest was happy with the outcome of the application and happy with the way in which it was handled by Argyll and Bute Council.” **David Biggin Environmental Analyst Marine Harvest**

## 7. Efficient and effective decision-making

### Ensuring structure and processes are proportionate

- 7.1 The planning service has invested heavily in recent years, with some financial assistance by the Scottish Government, in its processes, systems, training and technical equipment in an effort to deliver greater efficiency, transparency, speed and consistency in decision making together with better outcomes on the ground.
- 7.2 In 2013 there has been an increased emphasis in a number of key activities to help improve performance. These include:-

#### **Case Study – Efficient decision making – Improving effective case management**

On a quarterly basis service performance is reported directly to the Executive Director who then presents to full Council. On a monthly basis the Development Management Service Manager meets his area based managers to explain, justify and anticipate risks to future performance.

Area Managers in Development Management now employ a suite of performance management tools to get the most out of their staff. We currently use self-written 'Earliest Determination Date', 'About to expire', 'Applications on hand' and 'legacy' reports to target throughput. Area teams meet at least once per week to review these reports and apportion workload for the coming days giving due regard to potential impacts on the performance indicators. Work can also be shared around teams 'virtually' during times of staff absence or high workloads in any geographical area.

The focus in 2012/13 has been to improve and consolidate our performance against the historic % of applications determined within statutory timescale' indicators but conscious of the change to 'Average No. of Weeks timescale' we are now starting to use our 'Earliest Determination Date' reports and techniques much more frequently.

#### **Case Study – Efficient decision making – A key tool to help facilitate improved performance with less resource has been the introduction of our Agile Planners Initiative – Example of Flexible Case Working**

The creation of agile planners has been evolving in Argyll and Bute over the past 2 years but in 2012/13 we are really starting to reap the benefits as it couples cutting edge technology with modern management techniques and working patterns to deliver an output that is favoured by staff and customers alike. Planners now have total flexibility on where they work and live (cutting down on travel time a key issue for Argyll and Bute) plus are empowered to undertake their duties in a manner that is most efficient to the Council and themselves.

*It's 1pm on a stormy Tuesday afternoon on the Isle of Mull. The site visit this morning went well and I have agreed a way forward for the customer's new building. The ferry sailings have been delayed. I have a meeting at Council Headquarters in 3 hours: an application to write up for committee and some performance reports to run for my manager. Fortunately, I have my new laptop, so I go to the nearest wifi zone, be it a café, ferry port, school or council building. Once I'm connected to the internet, suddenly my office is where I am. Unified communication via wifi gives me secure access to my phone, council files, email, contacts and applications. I hold my meeting using the videocam built into my laptop, write my committee report and send it to Members, share my screen with my manager on the mainland to discuss my performance graphs then dial some applicants using my laptop phone"*



**Fiona Scott Planning Officer, Oban Area Team**

## Case Study – Efficient decision making – Approach to ‘legacy’ cases

In 2013 Development Management intensely micromanaged the legacy files and shall continue to do so in future years. The service initially recorded all legacy files (defined as application submitted in previous calendar year) and set targets on how many should be brought to determination each quarter. Staff and Managers were challenged to meet these targets in a similar way to the core Development Management performance targets. Outstanding Section 75s have been revisited; applications taken to Committee to be resolved and applications have been withdrawn through negotiation. Since our review of legacy files began we have now cleared out over 200 files with only 10 remaining from pre-2011.

**Table 1.1** was one of a number management tools we used to focus on the purge of legacy files. Extrapolating data in this table form meant we could see at a glance our 4 administration areas and how many legacy files were still ‘on the books’. We would then target these individually and set each area team performance aims to reduce the number of legacy files open in the quarter. We also laid down performance measures for our legal team by specifically identifying applications that remained undetermined due to S75 outstanding issues. The combination of targeted management and performance tools (such as table 1.1) has been very successful in clearing majority of legacy cases.

**Table 1.1**

Summary of Legacy Files open in UNIFORM as at: 30/08/13									
Unissued Decisions - S75's etc (AoH sect A)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Bute & Cowal									
Helensburgh & Lomond						1			1
Mid Argyll, Kintyre & Islay									
Oban, Lorn & The Isles									1
Major Applications Team									
Undetermined Applications (AoH sect B)	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Bute & Cowal								1	5
Helensburgh & Lomond	2	1	1		1			2	9
Mid Argyll, Kintyre & Islay				1	1		2	2	8
Oban, Lorn & The Isles									1
Major Applications Team									2
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>27</b>
									<b>42</b>



## Case Study – Efficient decision making – Self-Assessment and Business Process Review

The Planning Service piloted a Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) Assessment in 2011. The improvement plan that was an output of that process is currently being implemented and another round of PSIF is scheduled to take place in 2014. On-going assessment also comes from the regular monitoring of service complaints and customer feedback. Feedback and complaints are reviewed by the planning service managers and then reported to the Departmental Management Team on a quarterly basis alongside recommended alterations or adjustments that will improve the service in light of the feedback / complaint from the customer.

In 2013 Development Management also commenced a comprehensive Business Process Review (BPR) which seeks to assess all procedures involved with the lifecycle of a planning application. The BPR project shall be focussing on:-

1. Pre- Applications process;
2. Handling and processing of all forms of communication / post / email;
3. Electronic Planning Application procedures;
4. Manual Planning Application procedures;
5. The processing of all types of representations;
6. The establishment of a new suite of performance indicators to include 'real time' data;
7. Investigation of workload balancing techniques;
8. Research into the deployment of time recording systems.

## 8. Effective Management Structures

- 8.1 The Planning Service forms part of Planning and Regulatory Services that also consists of building standards, trading standards and environmental health. The service in its current form has been operational from 1st April 2010 as part of the Council's Transformation/Modernisation Programme. Operating under the leadership of the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services quarterly meetings are held with service managers and other key members of discuss management issues. Quarterly meetings are also held to discuss strategically important projects for the council involving other council services such economic development and roads and amenity services.
- 8.2 In 2012 the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services together with the Service Managers for Development Management and Policy successfully completed the Improvement Service sponsored Leading for Outcomes Programme. Planning managers are in the process of commencing Argyll and Bute Council's management training programme linked to the council's core competency framework and PRD process (see culture of continuous improvement section for further details).

## 9. Financial Management and Local Governance

- 9.1 The 2011 Service Review that delivered 21% budget savings without any loss of performance established that we were a cost effective service with a strong sense of direction and governance. Further efficiencies have been delivered through the annual service improvement and efficiencies programme which is submitted to the Scottish Government Built Environment Department as part of the requirement of the new Planning Act. In addition, an annual performance review is now required by the council which in turn is informed by scorecard reports that are published quarterly on Pyramid, the council's performance management system that has been in place for the last five years. Budget monitoring takes place on a monthly basis with individual managers and reviewed quarterly via the departmental management team. The increase of planning fees has however been critical to the resources available to the Argyll and Bute Planning Service and this has been reflected in our recent feedback to the Scottish Government on the value of the fee increase.

*"Within the Argyll and Bute Planning Service we have had significant cost pressures leading to a budget deficit over the past four years (circa £200K per annum) due to a shortfall in planning fee income resulting from a downturn in planning applications received / downturn in the local economy. This had resulted in the Council's Strategic Management Team / Departmental Management Team giving consideration to the Planning Service looking at staff reductions to help "balance the books" and reduce cost pressures on central reserves /Department budgets. Fortunately the planning fee increase introduced by the Scottish Government has enabled the Planning Service to address this budget deficit and as a result (for the time being) have been able to retain the existing staff resource and continue to improve our planning performance."* **Angus Gilmour Head of Planning and Regulatory Services.**

- 9.2 The planning service is also continuously reviewing performance and associated targets through benchmarking at a number of different levels across the service – measuring/auditing/comparing performance and process. Service delivery in Planning is planned and managed in a way to ensure that service aims have measurable targets which meet customer needs. Service Plan targets are set having taken into account of customer feedback (through user forums, web based and paper questionnaires, focus groups, complaints monitoring); national statutory performance indicators; project management methodology (PRINCE 2); Corporate Plan/Community Plan targets.
- 9.3 In addition, the planning service is fully compliant with the Council's procurement strategy and has also entered into a joint procurement framework with all Highland and Islands based Councils in 2011. The Framework is essentially a means by which you can request quotations for work packages from the three preferred Consultants for the appropriate Lot and instruct your requirements.

## **10. Culture of Continuous Improvement**

- 10.1 The Service recognises the need for continuous improvement and takes a pro-active approach to staff and elected member development and growing our own wherever possible to help achieve this.
- 10.2 In 2013 the council continues to invest in its staff with the introduction of a new Performance Review and Development (PRD) system, replacing the long established Personal Development Review (PDR). The PRD system places greater emphasis on improving employee performance linked to SMART targets and key priorities of the council. All planning staff are in the process of receiving training in the new PRD process with a view to implementing the new system this financial year. The PRD process is also linked to core competency frameworks that will have to be achieved by all staff following training provided at a corporate level by the council.
- 10.3 The Council seeks to further support staff by investing in their professional development with training priorities linked to corporate and service outcomes. In 2012/2013 Planning Service staff attended 43 different training courses provided by both internal and external suppliers to meet their individual development. Courses have included – PRINCE2 Project Management, Trevor Roberts Associates Technical Skills Courses, Dealing with Difficult Customers, GIS 24/7, PRD training, Microsoft Project, Managing Absence, Writing in Plain English and Agile Working. In addition the planning service has also carried out the following actions highlighted as case studies:-

## Case Study – Continuous Improvement – Elected Member Development – Bite Size Learning

The modernisation of planning cannot be achieved by legislative and procedural changes alone. In addition to the need for officers to broaden their competencies and to engage in Continual Professional Development, it is also necessary for Members to develop the confidence to be able to participate in decision-making knowledgeably, with an appropriate level of understanding of the planning process, an appreciation of the key planning issues of importance in Argyll and Bute. This is particularly important in the context of maintaining probity in the planning process, in ensuring transparency in terms of procedure and outcomes, and having regard to the quasi-judicial nature of planning decisions which are made by Members.

In 2013 Argyll and Bute commenced a schedule of ‘bite sized’ Member training seminars and workshops. The main purpose of the training is to provide insight into areas which are relevant to the consideration of planning applications and local reviews. These events have been augmented by participation by partners such as statutory consultees (SNH and SEPA), by way of occasional half-day workshops to enable some interactive participation, and by occasional site visits where an appreciation of development can be best achieved at first hand.

### Our Programme for Elected Member Training Includes in Table 1.2

Date	Committee day training	Half day workshop	Visit
Feb 2013	Material planning considerations		
March 2013	Planning conditions and legal agreements		
April 2012			Tangy windfarm and Wind Towers factory
May 2013		Competent motions	
June 2013		Local Development Plan	
August 2013	Role of Scottish Natural Heritage		
September 2013	Local Review Bodies		
October 2013	Biodiversity, Natura and appropriate assessment		
November 2013	Role of SEPA		
December 2013	Planning Enforcement		

*“The planning training for elected Members has been well received and improved the capacity of Councillors that sit and make decisions on the Planning Committee. The sessions have been concise and relevant to the issues we face in Argyll and Bute and it has been fantastic to have external input from the likes of SNH and Windtowers Ltd. I am looking forward to more workshops in 2014 as they have improved Members appreciation of technical issues and ultimately enhanced the decisions made by the Council”*

**Quote Cllr Sandy Taylor – Chair of Planning, Protective Services and Licencing Committee.**



## **Case Study - Continuous Improvement - Sharing Knowledge and Experience with other Local Authorities**

We are a regular attendee and contributor to Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) work streams and are part of the newly formed Large Rural Authority Benchmarking Club (insert link to findings). Previous benchmarking clubs have included the Rural9 and Highlands and Islands club. We are also a member of the Local Authority Aquaculture Forum and hosted this year's site visits and meeting in Lorn and Mull to share experience and the latest developments in aquaculture policy (link to agenda).

The purpose and benefit of the various benchmarking clubs has been to share experience, policy development, management strategies and performance data. This opportunity has been vitally important during the Council's service review process and on-going pursuit of continuous improvement.

Argyll and Bute along with Edinburgh Council has been at the forefront of meeting with the Scottish Government in assessing performance statistics and refinement of Development Management quarterly returns – notably 'Clockstopping' proposals. We recently hosted planning staff, senior managers and Councillors from West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC). Our neighbouring Authority was in the process of determining their first commercial windfarm application and through our network it was identified that a practical orientation visit to an operational windfarm would be beneficial for WDC staff and officials. Argyll and Bute staff and a local Councillor provided a guided walk and presentation on material considerations and overview to the determining factors affecting the windfarm visited. The process was cost effective, relevant and added value to the decision making process in WDC. It has also strengthened relationships bringing increased opportunities for joint working in the future between the neighbouring Councils.

## **Case study - Maximising Attendance – Planning and Regulatory Services**

Existing – 2012 -13 target actual average days lost per employee 7.8

Existing – 2012 -13 actual average days lost per employee 3.4

Proposed target for next year 6.0

### **Strategy**

A key priority of the council and the Planning Service is to maximise attendance of its staff and reduce unnecessary costs to service delivery. To help achieve this it is vital that staff remain committed and motivated with a clear understanding of service priorities and outcomes. This has been achieved through clear work plans, regular staff meetings, flexible/mobile working practices, good communication, managers exhibiting effective leadership and being proactive including providing training to all staff.

This sustained commitment to effectively managing both long term and short term absences has led to a substantial reduction of individual staff absence to only 3.4 (below the council average) days per annum from a previous high of 9 (above council average) in 2013.

- 10.4 The service also employs a number of mechanisms to drive forward improvements in service delivery. These include submission of annual service improvement plans to the Scottish Government, COSLA and the council together with the completion of a biennial Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF). The first PSIF was held in 2010 and the last one in 2012 and it has now been agreed to undertake a refresh in 2014. The findings of the PSIF helps identify service wide improvements which are incorporated into the service improvement plan and the planning performance framework.
- 10.5 The planning service also continues to support our 'grow our own' policy that aims to help retain good staff by assisting them with career progression from admin in some cases to technician and from technician through to professional officer.
- 10.6 In 2013 a built heritage intern post has been created to allow the current built heritage officer to undertake a new built heritage strategy for Argyll and Bute as an alternative to appointing external consultants. While this post will only be created initially for one year it is hoped that it will provide key experience for the successful candidate Florence Pye to allow her to further develop her career.



*'I am really looking forward to my year in Argyll and Bute Council. My training in building conservation will allow me to provide technical advice to both the planning service and the public. I hope to gain a thorough understanding of the planning process and legislation, and how this affects listed buildings and conservation areas. This is an incredible opportunity for me to develop my skills and see conservation in action.'* **Florence Pye**  
**Built Heritage Intern**

## 11. Supporting Evidence

11.1 Part 2 of this report was compiled, drawing on evidence from the following sources.

- The ["Lorn Arc" project](#) is an ambitious £20million proposal to extend Oban's North Pier and construct road infrastructure in Dunbeg/ Dunstaffnage.
- The [Local Development Plan \(LDP\)](#) is an updated and combined version of the [Structure Plan](#) and [Local Plan](#) that will eventually replace these two documents.
- The Council operates a formalised pre-application system called Planning for Firm Foundations. You can find out more information in our [leaflet](#), or use the [Pre-Application Enquiry Form](#) or [Householder Pre-Application Enquiry Form](#) to submit an enquiry.
- [Examples of Good Design](#). Within Argyll and Bute we have a design strategy which aims to achieve high quality new development that respects the local environment and provides a sense of place.
- One of the main objectives of our sustainable design strategy is for the Council to lead by example and demonstrate sustainable design by providing case studies to illustrate the principles of the Council's sustainable [design guides](#).
- Argyll and Bute Council has agreed to an ambitious and forward-looking programme to assist regeneration and economic development in five of its waterfront towns - Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Oban, Rothesay and Dunoon. In November 2008, the Council unanimously agreed to allocate more than £30 million to the programme, since named ['CHORD'](#)
- The Argyll and Bute [Design Awards](#) are intended to recognise, promote and celebrate examples of exceptional design quality within both an urban and rural context across the whole of the Argyll and Bute Council Planning Area.
- [Planning and Regulatory Services' Customer Service Charter](#) is part of our annual improvement plan aimed at further improving customer service standards.
- Guidance and advice on [making a planning application](#)
- Argyll and Bute Council actively encourage online submission of planning applications via the [Scottish Government ePlanning Portal](#).
- Our [online planning information system](#) holds records of all planning and building standards applications, appeals and enforcement notices.
- Detailed information regarding the Council's [Planning Service](#) can be found on our website.
- A copy of the [Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire](#) is sent out with every decision notice.
- [Feedback from our User Forum - October 2012](#)
- Community Council [training and consultation events](#) have been held.
- The Council's comprehensive [Scheme of delegation](#)
- The [Council's procurement strategy](#)
- The Council has also entered into a [Joint Procurement Framework](#) with all Highland and Islands based Councils.

- [Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement](#)
- [Validation Check sheet](#)
- [Self-Assessment Report for Public Service Improvement Framework \(PSIF\)](#)
- [Public Service Improvement Framework \(PSIF\) Assessment Score](#)
- [Performance Review and Development plan \(PRD\) Form](#)
- [Performance Review and Development plan \(PRD\) Procedure](#)
- [Planning Services Review – Benchmarking Report](#)
- [Planning Validation Process Map](#)
- Staff Survey Results
  - [Communications Survey](#)
  - [Questionnaire Summary](#)
  - [Questionnaire Summary – Workshop responses](#)
  - [Staff Workshop Agenda](#)
  - [Questionnaire Response Figures](#)



## **12. Service Improvements: 2013-14**

12.1 In the coming year we will:

### **IMPROVEMENT AREA 1 - DEVELOPING SKILLS**

- Carry out annual performance development review (PRD) for all staff aligned to continuous professional development training programmes to ensure Planning officers have relevant skills for job
- Continue to implement "Grow Our Own" policy to enable administrative and Technical staff to gain relevant qualifications to participate in career grade progression which is part of our succession planning strategy
- Undertake staff training on cumulative impacts of on shore wind

### **IMPROVEMENT AREA 2 - IMPROVING PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES ON THE GROUND**

- Implement consolidated developer contributions advice.
- Expand remit of large rural authority benchmarking club
- Explore the feasibility and available options for the creation of a design review panel
- Implement Historic Scotland Joint Working Agreement

### **IMPROVEMENT AREA 3 - EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT BUSINESS PROCESSES**

- Undertake a full Service Improvement Project for Development Management (BPR for all DM business) in partnership with the council's Performance and Business Improvement Manager
- Implement the areas of improvement identified in the 2012 PSIF for Planning Services
- Update and standardise Section 75 legal agreements.
- Introduce a time recording system for all planning staff to help measure performance and value for money.
- Review and update current scheme of delegation

### **IMPROVEMENT AREA 4 - BETTER AND MORE EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

- Adopt LDP and produce Action programme
- Produce a Built Heritage Strategy to address current issues and realise new opportunities with our built heritage
- Expand remit of user forums to include additional council services with a relationship with planning i.e. roads and legal services

### **IMPROVEMENT AREA 5 - PROPORTIONATE AND PRACTICAL PLANNING POLICIES AND ADVICE**

- Develop implementation plan to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the high hedges act
- Publish and adopt technical guidance notes with regard to on shore wind cumulative landscape impacts

## Delivery of our service improvement actions in 2012-13:

Committed improvements and actions	Complete?
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out annual performance development review (PDR) for all staff aligned to continuous professional development training programmes to ensure</li> </ul> <p>(100% completed work underway to replace PDR system with PRD system for all staff)</p>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to implement "Grow Our Own" policy to enable administrative and Technical staff to gain relevant qualifications to participate in career grade progression which is part of our succession planning strategy</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a robust scheme of staff job satisfaction and monitoring (will be taken forward as a corporate initiative)</li> </ul>	No
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake landscape capacity training for key planning staff involved in determining renewable energy applications</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the Coastal Development Strategy to help improve economic performance</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement joint working agreement with aquaculture industry to improve efficiency of processing aquaculture applications and to realise sustainable development opportunities.</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Historic Scotland Joint Working Agreement (work underway)</li> </ul>	No
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the overhaul of our standard conditions and S75 processes and legal agreements (standard conditions work completed S75 work underway)</li> </ul>	In Part
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the areas of improvement identified in the 2012 PSIF for Planning Services</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce a time recording system for all planning staff to help measure performance and value for money.</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold LDP awareness sessions with key plan stakeholders</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a series of Developer days for vacant listed buildings in council ownership</li> </ul>	Yes
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce a Built Heritage Strategy to address current issues and realise new opportunities with our built heritage (work underway built heritage intern appointed to allow strategy to be written)</li> </ul>	No
<b>[Commitment]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce Finalised LDP and all associated supplementary guidance</li> </ul>	Yes

# Appendix I

## PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK OFFICIAL STATISTICS

### Decision-making timescales

Category	Total number of decisions 2012-2013	Average timescale (weeks)	
		2012-2013	2011-2012
<b>Major developments</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>88.2</b>	<b>94.3</b>
<b>Local developments (non-householder)</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>16.8</b>
• Local: less than 2 months	<b>414 (59.8%)</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>7.5</b>
• Local: more than 2 months	<b>278 (40.2%)</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>38.2</b>
<b>Householder developments</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>9.1</b>
• Local: less than 2 months	<b>320 (86.0%)</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>6.8</b>
• Local: more than 2 months	<b>52 (14.0%)</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>38.0</b>
<b>Housing developments</b>			
<b>Major</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>129.4</b>
<b>Local housing developments</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>17.9</b>
• Local: less than 2 months	<b>183 (54.1%)</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>7.8</b>
• Local: more than 2 months	<b>155 (45.9%)</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>42.2</b>
<b>Business and industry</b>			
<b>Major</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>67.4</b>
<b>Local business and industry</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>12.1</b>
• Local: less than 2 months	<b>31 (66.0%)</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>7.2</b>
• Local: more than 2 months	<b>16 (34.0%)</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>26.1</b>
<b>EIA developments</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>61.8</b>
<b>Other consents*</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>11.6</b>
<b>Planning/legal agreements**</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>72.8</b>
<b>Local reviews</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10.6</b>

\* Consents and certificates: Listed buildings and Conservation area consents, Control of Advertisement consents, Hazardous Substances consents, Established Use Certificates, certificates of lawfulness of existing use or development, notification on overhead electricity lines, notifications and directions under GPDO Parts 6 & 7 relating to agricultural and forestry development and applications for prior approval by Coal Authority or licensed operator under classes 60 & 62 of the GPDO.

\*\* Legal obligations associated with a planning permission; concluded under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 or section 69 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973

## Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2012-2013 No.	%	2011-2012 No.	%
Local reviews	20	16	70.0%	10	71.4%
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	6	6	100.0%	7	87.5%

## Enforcement activity

	2012-2013	2011-2012
Cases taken up	295	262
Breaches identified	275	Not available
Cases resolved	185	Not available
Notices served***	45	63
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0	0
Prosecutions	0	0

\*\*\* Enforcement notices; breach of condition notices; planning contravention notices; stop notices; temporary stop notices; fixed penalty notices, and Section 33 notices.

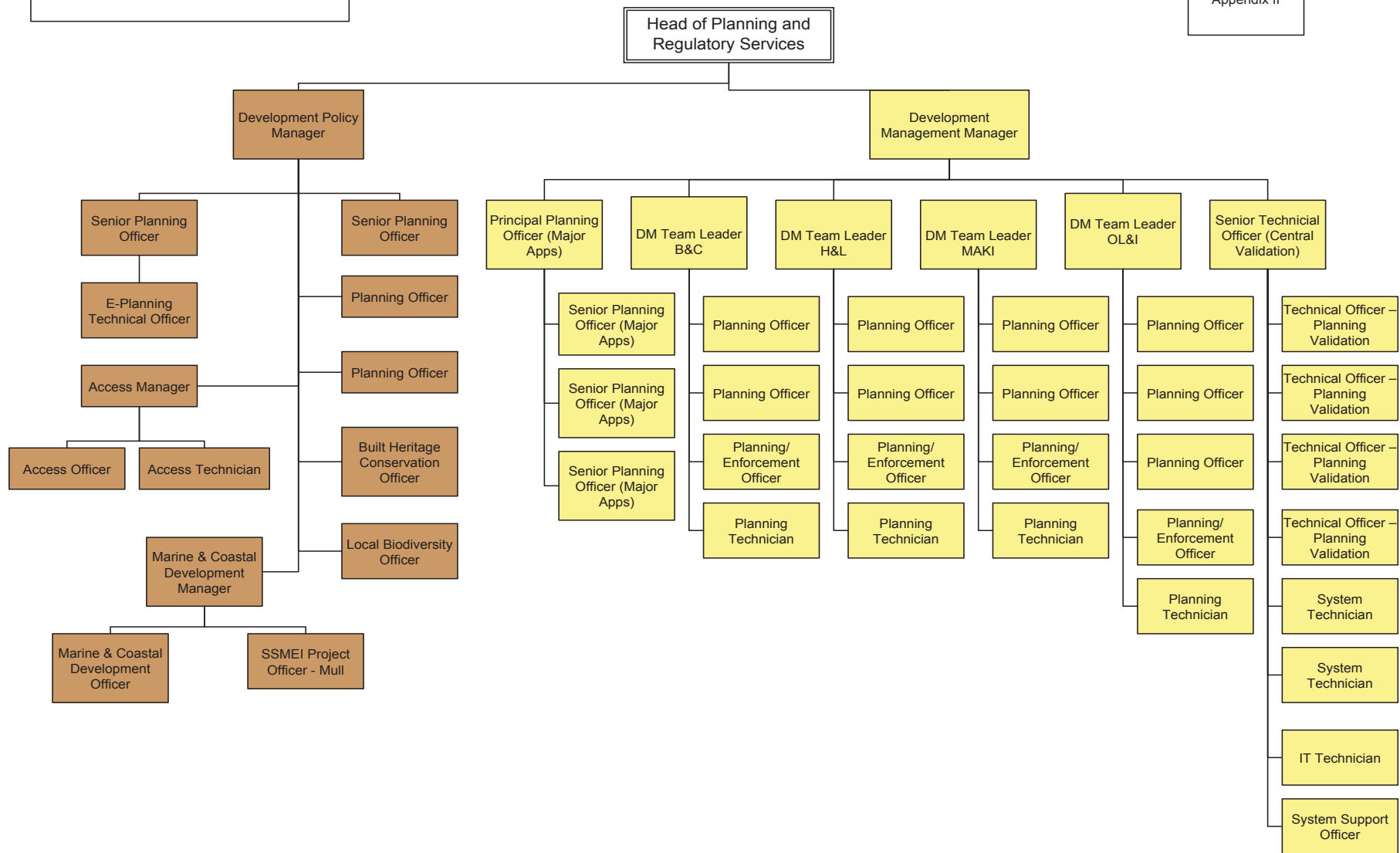
## Context

Argyll and Bute Planning Service continues to undertake a number of improvement actions to reduce average determination timescales across the board. The certainty of our decision making continues to improve with all 6 appeals to Scottish Ministers being found in the Council's favour.

There are however two exceptions to this improved performance relating to:

1. "Other Consents" which increased from 11.6 to 13.1 weeks to determine. This figure is skewed by two legacy LIB files from 2006 which were determined this year. Without these exceptional cases (06/00302/LIB and 06/02276/LIB), the figure would have reduced to 9.3 weeks. No evidence was supplied to enable "clock-stopping" requests for these cases.
2. EIA Developments increased from 61.8 to 65.4 weeks to determine due to the relative complexity of the cases involved some requiring longer term survey work to inform outcomes.





## Appendix II

### WORKFORCE AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

*Appendix 2 is an integral part of the Annual Performance Assessment. It is designed to be a snapshot of staffing at 31 March 2013.*

As at 31 March 2013

Please note - The figures do not have to be exact - we are looking for a snapshot of each authority

Head of Planning Service (1)	Tier 3								
	Managers (2)		Main Grade Posts		Technician Posts		Office support/Clerical		
	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	No. Posts	Vacant	Totals
Development Management	1		15.5		11				27.5
Development Planning	1		8		1				10
Enforcement Staff			4						4
Cross Service/Other Planning	2		4		2				8

Staffing profile	Number
Under 30	3
30-39	15
40-49	18
50 and Over	14

Committees & site visits (3)	No. per year
Full Council committees	0
Planning Committees	11
Area Committees (where relevant)	n/a
Committee site visits	10
LRB (4)	23
LRB site visits	6

Budgets	Budget	Costs		Income (7)
Planning Service		Direct (5)	Indirect (6)	
Development Management	989,603*	1,219,939	540,721	805,111
Development Planning	594,770	442,461	162,544	
Enforcement		166,484	40,699	

\*Enforcement included in Development Management budget



Creating high quality development:  
Affordable Housing, Park Square, Campbeltown