RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

AGENDA

13th Meeting, 2002 (Session 1)

Monday 13 May 2002

The Committee will meet at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Lochgilphead.

1. **Subordinate Legislation:** The Committee will consider the following instruments under the negative procedure—

   The Loch Ewe, Isle of Ewe, Wester Ross, Scallops Several Fishery (Variation) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/185)

   The Little Loch Broom Scallops Several Fishery Order 2002 (SSI 2002/186)

   The Registration of Fish Farming and Shellfish Farming Businesses Amendment (Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/193)


2. **Integrated Rural Development:** The Committee will take evidence on its inquiry into integrated rural development from the following—

   Shona Anderson

   Leslie Howarth (Vestas - Celtic Wind Technology Ltd)

   Robert Miller (Kintyre Initiative Working Group)

   Kenny Robison (Gigha Community Heritage Trust)

   Ian Cleaver (Highland Heritage Ltd)

   Patrick Stewart (Clyde Fishermen’s Association)

   Stephanie McDougall (McDougall’s of Oban)

   Billy Ronald (Farmer).

3. **Integrated Rural Development:** The Committee will continue its inquiry into integrated rural development and take evidence from the following—

   Ken Abernethy (Argyll and the Islands Enterprise)
George Harper (Argyll & Bute Council).

Tracey Hawe
Acting Clerk to the Committee
The following papers are attached or are relevant to this meeting:

**Agenda item 1: Subordinate Legislation**

The Loch Ewe, Isle of Ewe, Wester Ross, Scallops Several Fishery (Variation) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/185)

The Little Loch Broom Scallops Several Fishery Order 2002 (SSI 2002/186)

The Registration of Fish Farming and Shellfish Farming Businesses Amendment (Scotland) Order 2002 (SSI 2002/193)


Extracts from the Subordinate Legislation Committee’s 22nd Report is attached

Extracts from the Subordinate Legislation Committee’s 23rd Report (to follow)

**Agenda item 2: Integrated Rural Development**

Submission from Argyll & Bute Council is attached.

Scottish Executive news release on Vestas is attached
RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

My name is George Harper, I am the Council’s Director of Development and Environment Services – my remit covers most aspects of the Council’s involvement in rural Development – Development Plans, Economic Strategy and their links to Transportation Strategy, Waste Management Strategy, Environmental Health, Planning and Building Control – I am also responsible for European Affairs and related funding which encompasses all of the above.

The Key issues which I wish to highlight are as follows:

PROBLEMS

Transportation

Without doubt the most significant issue which impacts on the attainment of integrated rural development is the adequacy or otherwise of the Transportation Network.

For rural communities to develop they require access to a convenient, fit for purpose and affordable means of transport, capable of moving individuals or goods within a reasonable timescale at a frequency commensurate with their requirements.

The problem for many areas of Argyll and Bute is that the above criteria are not satisfied.

Roads

Roads in the Highlands and Islands are often sub-standard in terms of width and alignment. This is particularly the case for the secondary road network used by local industries such as Forestry and Aquaculture. The problem is further exacerbated by the presence of weak bridges which necessitate the introduction of weight restrictions. While in other areas this may result in only a minor diversion the situation in Argyll and Bute is that there is often only a single means of access and therefore the imposition of such restrictions represents a major constraint on economic development.

A recent survey by the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) indicated that there was a 30% shortfall in the level of revenue funding simply to maintain the road network in its present unsatisfactory condition.
Ferry Services

Communities in Argyll and Bute’s 26 inhabited islands are dependent on ferry transport for their links to the mainland. While short sea crossings are less of an impediment than longer crossings, the level of fares and frequency of service particularly on Cal Mac services are a major factor which adversely affects the cost of living and heightens the sense of remoteness and peripherality. The fact that the last sailing to Islay in winter leaves the mainland at approximately 1.00 p.m. and also that children on Coll and Colonsay are unable to return home at weekends are but examples of the problems currently experienced by island communities.

Just as the introduction of ro-ro services saw a major change in the way in which islands were served in the 1970’s, there is a requirement at this time to re-examine the location of terminals to assess if the historic routes remain the most appropriate or whether alternative shorter sea crossings would offer significant advantages.

A key issue for the economy of Argyll and Bute will be the introduction of the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry in 2003 – this is not only vitally important for the tourism industry but also a much needed economic link to Ireland for, inter-alia, the newly established VESTAS CELTIC (Wind Turbine Manufacturers) which now employs over a 100 people at a site on the former air base at Machrihanish.

Air Services

Unlike other countries within the European Union, the UK makes only limited use of the option to designate air services as being a Public Service Obligation (PSO). Even where such a designation is granted, the standard fare is high compared with the average income of the people living within the communities served. While recognising the financial constraints on the level of subsidy which can be provided, the opportunity exists for the Scottish Executive and the operators of the services to be more innovative in their revenue management systems in order to attract new business and to fill the spare capacity on these routes e.g. by adopting similar marketing strategies to those of the low cost airlines. (This latter point could equally apply to Shipping Services).

Bus Services

The present means of allocating financial support through the GAE mechanism for bus services, which is based on population, is flawed and takes no cognisance of the availability or otherwise of commercial services and the consequential requirement for the Local Authority to provide a subsidy.

Rail Services

Owing to the restricted number of lines and the track limitations which exist, rail offers only limited opportunities in terms of supporting rural development. It does however provide an alternative means of access for tourism and with the support provided through Freight Facilities Grants has facilitated a limited modal shift from road freight to rail.
Fuel Pricing

Blanket policies of fuel taxation aimed at reducing traffic volumes in urban areas discriminate disproportionately in rural areas where the need for and distance of travel is higher and where there are effectively no alternative means of transport. The problem is compounded by higher fuel prices in rural areas being subject to fixed percentage tax rates.

General

There is a need to look in greater detail at how transport modes could be better integrated and the resources deployed more efficiently in order to enhance transport opportunities. For example, in order to solve the problem of school children being unable to return home at weekends on some of the Argyll Islands, it may be more appropriate to operate a local air service rather than to divert one of the larger Cal Mac ships from its main route.

Service Provision

High Cost of Providing Services

The high cost of providing services in areas of extreme rurality e.g. an average annual refuse collection cost of over £350 per head of population in parts of Argyll and Bute against £50 per head in Helensburgh, is a barrier to effective service delivery. The same is true of leisure, community, library and many other services.

Legislative Barriers

Legislative barriers on how services have to be delivered, e.g. high standards of construction for waste disposal sites appropriate to urban areas, are too onerous for a rural location, to the point where a perverse outcome of having to transport waste long distances results. This can impose a very high cost penalty for waste disposal and lead to the further perverse outcome of illegal tipping becoming prevalent.

OPPORTUNITIES

European Input

The Council is currently pursuing all eligible aspects of European funding as it relates to rural, remote and island communities through transitional objective One Funding, INTERREG Programmes and is progressing the above through CPMR, INTERREG Euromontana and Islands Networks.

The Council recognises the importance of the European Union to development in remote, island and peninsular communities in both funding and policy terms.
Funding support for initiatives that support the remote and island communities is pursued from all relevant European sources. The Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme has supported strategic projects such as the Council's Waste Management Programme; networking with small European islands is being explored through INTERREG III; and the LEADER + Programme is being delivered by the Council specifically to support remote and island communities at a grassroots level.

In policy terms, the Council recognises that the decisions taken on the European stage impact fundamentally on the viability of remote and island areas. Through the Highlands and Islands European Partnership, we participate in regular video conferences with the MEPs on pertinent issues being debated in the Parliament such as the Common Fisheries Policy, CAP and the proposed WEEE Directive, which directly impact on these communities. Membership of the CPMR gives us the opportunity to voice our opinions on European policy developments and their effect on our peripheral areas. Euromontana and the CPMR Islands Commission are also organisations that support us in delivering our message to the areas at the heart of European governance. The Council welcomes the Commission's White Paper on European Governance, which recognises the key issue, that we have long been aware of, where the level of government with responsibility to implement regulations must be involved in the development of those regulations. We look forward to participating in this subsidiarity in action.

Renewable Energy

The key message is that renewable energy has the potential to play as vital a role in rural development as in combating climate change

- Argyll and Bute and its partners, is actively seeking to promote Argyll and Bute as a welcome home for renewable energy. Already a significant number of windfarms have been approved for the area.
- Argyll and Bute is the home of the first commercial wave energy device in the world.
- The Council is working closely with the Islay Development Company and the Argyll, Lomond and the Islands, Energy Agency, to develop the concept of the "Green Island" on Islay - a 100% renewable island!
- Through the Agriculture Forum, the Council is seeking to raise awareness of farm diversification opportunities through small-scale renewables.

The Council is engaged in discussions with Highlands and Islands Enterprise over the best ways to encourage small scale, community, renewable energy developments, drawing on the considerable experience and expertise which has accumulated in Argyll and Bute in this field.

GOOD PRACTICE

Digital Communities

Argyll and Bute has succeeded in winning the Scottish Executive's Digital Communities challenge bid which involves providing each household in a selected area with its own PC, printer, and free internet access as well as a community portal for the entire area.
Argyll and Bute put forward for the bid the North Argyll Islands. This community was selected not just because it suffers from all the characteristics of deprivation which afflict many remote rural areas of Scotland, but because these deprivations are magnified by the permanent physical handicap of living on an island. (Argyll and Bute is at the forefront of lobbying in Scotland for the needs of islands’ communities and has initiated the Small Islands Network).

The opportunity to communicate speedily, interact with their peers, access life long learning materials, and rightfully take their role in the digital revolution will provide a most effective means of confronting the detrimental effects of isolation and social exclusion in these island communities.

Agriculture Forum

One of the major challenges to effective integrated rural development is that of achieving greater integration between the key economic sectors in rural communities, agriculture, forestry, fishing, renewable energy, tourism, recreation. This is particularly important in relation to the agriculture sector, which is going through a period of significant readjustment. The Argyll and Bute Agriculture Forum is seeking to promote increased integrated working and networking with other sectors. One example is a forthcoming Food Industry Seminar that will seek to inform farmers of the opportunities for adding value locally to their produce partly by learning from the experience of the fishing and particularly the shellfish industry.

Core Path Network Project

A flagship, innovative, project for Argyll and Bute Council and a wide range of partners, local and national, is the promotion, in advance of the Land Reform Bill becoming law, of the development of a Core Path Network. This will meet the needs of communities throughout Argyll and Bute for countryside access, and will engage landowners and land managers, directly in the process, seeking to alleviate their concerns over the new legislation and help them to draw benefits from countryside access.

Three Islands Partnership

With the help of the Scottish Executives’ Modernising Government Fund, the Council has been able by working in partnership with local Argyll and the islands Enterprise and Argyll and Clyde Health Board to provide first contact offices on Islay, Jura and Colonsay. Other users will include the Lomond and Argyll Primary Healthcare Trust, the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service and Argyll College. The Crofters commission and SERAD are also interested. With video conferencing and latest ICT these offices will enable local people to contact the Council, AIE, and other partners and obtain access to a range of services equivalent to that obtainable on the mainland.

Initiative at the Edge

This no financial input from government but encourages partners (Council, AIE, SNH, Crofters Commission and Communities Scotland) to prioritise these areas – The Rural Affairs Committee is going to Colonsay on 22 May 2002.

George Harper 7th May 2002