

Argyll and Bute Council

Rural Development Inquiry Submission July 2005



Leading Rural Area



Introduction.

Argyll and Bute is unique in that it contains examples of all classifications of rurality. It is a hybrid, combining urban areas bordering on Glasgow with extremely remote rural areas including an array of islands. There are accessible rural areas within Argyll and Bute, around Helensburgh and around Dunoon. There is also an emerging accessible rural area around the growing town of Oban.

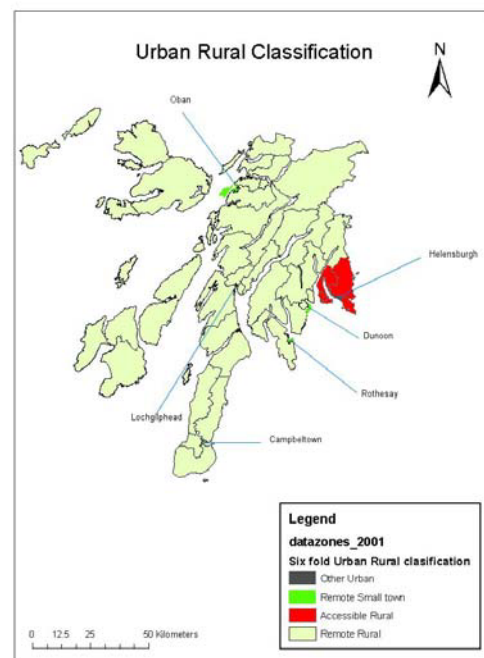
This document is submitted by Argyll and Bute Council with contributions from the Community Planning Partnership. It will focus on the Helensburgh Accessible Rural Area and briefly describe the Dunoon and Oban accessible rural areas.

Argyll and Bute.

Argyll and Bute is a study in diversity covering 10% of the Scottish land mass. The population of 91,306 is spread over the second largest council area in Scotland. The area has six towns, 25 inhabited islands and over 4,500km of coastline – more than the entire coastline of France.

Having extremely remote island communities at one extreme and urban centres adjacent to Glasgow at the other makes it difficult to define Argyll and Bute in terms of Urban or Rural. The everyday life of someone living on the Island of Colonsay is vastly different than an individual living in Helensburgh, the area's largest urban centre. The provision of services that may be taken for granted by urban residents, are a matter of serious trial for some rural communities. Conversely, the rural communities' access to green space and the area's outstanding biodiversity are the envy of many urban dwellers. A thorough understanding of these differences is essential to developing policy and delivering services within Argyll and Bute.

The map shows Argyll and Bute in terms of the Scottish Executives Urban Rural classifications. The area in red is the Accessible Rural Area around Helensburgh. Oban is shown as a Remote Small Town, in green, as is Dunoon.



Helensburgh area

Helensburgh, (c 14,000), Argyll and Bute's most populous town is very much an urban community. However, within 30 minutes drive of Helensburgh there is a large expanse of sparsely populated rural land. While at once being within a relatively short distance from the urban area, it is also very much a rural area with all settlements significantly smaller in population than 3000. The physical geography of the area, adds to the sense of remoteness and does create access issues. The population of the Accessible Rural Area around Helensburgh was 13183 in 2001. The largest settlement is Cardross with a population of just under 2000.

Access

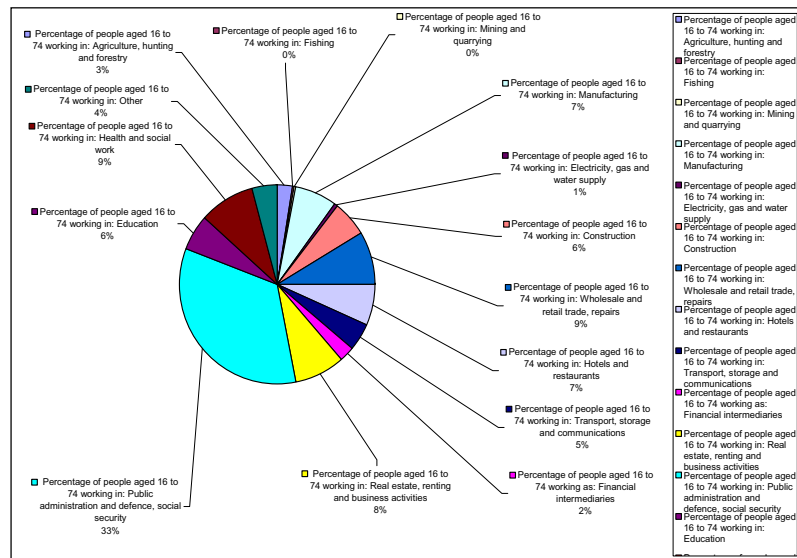
Transport links in the area are somewhat mixed. There is a rail link which connects the villages of Arrochar, Garelochhead and those along the coasts of Loch Long and Loch Gare, with Helensburgh. There are also several bus services; however the physical nature of the area means that land links are seldom direct and the roads are often difficult for drivers. The main trunk road, the A82 along Loch Lomond provides a reasonably direct link to the greater Glasgow area. As is often the case in rural Argyll, car ownership is proportionally high as people are less able to rely on public transport.

The proportion of households without access to a car or van is lower (19.15%) than the Argyll and Bute average (28%). Households that have access to two or more cars make up 35.14% of all households, a higher figure compared to Argyll and Bute as a whole (25%). More people use the train to travel to work or study, compared to the council average. The rail service is set to be increased through the provision of an early morning train intended to allow people resident in the periphery of the area to commute to Glasgow for work.

Economy

The working age population (aged 16-74) of the area is 9400 with an average unemployment level among economically active persons of 3.4%. A large proportion of employment is attributed to the Public Administration and Defence sector. Much of this is due to the presence of Clyde Naval base and other MOD installations. However there is a heavy reliance on public sector employment in general. This single sector reliance can leave the economy vulnerable to sudden changes in employment levels.

The chart shows employment by industry type. The accessibility of the region lends itself to servicing a commuter population who may work within the Glasgow Urban Area. Thus a high proportion of resident's economic activity occurs outside the area, yet this section of the population has an economic impact in terms of service and infrastructure provision. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest



that the commuter population spend significant sums within the area of their work as opposed to the area in which they live, thus further depriving the area of economic activity.

The table below shows the 2003 CACI household income statistics for the four wards that comprise the Accessible Rural area.

Ward	Households	Mean	Median	Mode
Garelochhead and Cove	1074	£29600	£20-25k	£15-20k
Arrochar, Luss, Arden and Ardenconnel	1086	£34100	£25-30k	£20-25k
Roseneath, Clynder and Kilcreggan	1153	£29300	£30-35k	£15-20k
Cardross	936	£35500	£30-35k	£20-25k

While the mean values suggest a positive picture in terms of household incomes, the mode and median show that there is a clustering of incomes around the lower end that has been offset by relatively few higher income households. This shows the impact that high income earners can have on an area in terms of how affluent it appears to be.

Deprivation

Deprivation is often overlooked in rural areas and difficult to assess when it is investigated. Access and housing deprivation are areas of high concern and need to be addressed. Income deprivation can also be an issue and is difficult to spot in areas like this where seasonal employment often fills gaps, but still does not provide adequate income. The access issues

lead to a reliance on private transport and this in turn impacts on household budgets, reducing disposable income.

Housing

There is a lack of affordable housing across the area and this is exacerbated by the increasing commuter market. Argyll and Bute has experienced the highest rise in house prices across Scotland in the past year and the Helensburgh and Lomond area is no exception, indeed the new National Park may lead to even greater demand for second homes and inflated local house prices. Improved rail links to Glasgow may well contribute to a continued house price increase in the area as high income commuters begin to move in. Second home ownership is also putting a strain on the housing market in terms of affordable housing. This then has a detrimental effect on the economy as people find it increasingly difficult to afford to live and work in the area.

Around Dunoon

Though Dunoon itself has a population of less than 10000 (population 8251) its direct access by ferry to the periphery of the greater Glasgow conurbation suggests that it would make sense to view it as an urban centre in itself. Within 10 to 30 minutes of Dunoon is an accessible rural area of considerable size, including a variety of small towns and lesser settlements. The area is located on the Cowal peninsula, an area of land almost physically disconnected from the rest of the Argyll and Bute. The same issues as described for the Helensburgh Accessible Rural area hold for Dunoon. There are areas of rural deprivation, there is a lack of affordable housing and there are high numbers of commuters whose economic activity is carried out externally. Additionally all hospital treatment, other than minor matters or consultations, requires a ferry crossing to Gourock then ambulance/train/bus to the designated hospital.

Around Oban

The town of Oban, with a population of 8120, is currently experiencing growth which is bringing it closer to the scale of Urban centre than Accessible small town. It is logical then to regard the area around Oban as becoming an accessible rural area. This area differs dramatically from the others described and probably all others in Scotland, in that it is remote from the major urban centres of Scotland. Here the issue of commuters and their external economic activity is not apparent. However, there is still an issue of affordable housing, mainly driven by the second home market. There is also a need to continue this growth by encouraging further investment and job creation in Oban and the surrounding area. Affordable housing and infrastructure investment within the surrounding communities is required in order to maintain them alongside the growing urban centre.

Oban is the main port for the area with ferry services to islands within Argyll and Bute and the western isles. The surrounding rural area is remote or very remote with very few settlements of notable size, thus Oban is a strong economic focus for the area. The impact of investment in Oban would thus be spread over a large rural hinterland. This would contribute to creating a strong and sustainable economic base that would not be reliant on neighbouring urban regions.

National Factors

How these issues are reflected in government policy stems initially from how they are reported. The SIMD data that supports policy decisions, though valuable, is flawed in some aspects relating to rural communities. The main issues are with the measurement of Geographic and Telecommunications Access Domain and the Income Domain.

Geographic and Telecommunications Access Domain

At present, the Geographic and Telecommunications Access domain does not make allowances for people who do not have access to a car. Some measure of travel times via public transport would be beneficial and complement drive time data. This would also give greater weight to the significant proportion of the population who have no access to the car.

The SIMD focuses on basic services when assessing access deprivation. This is problematic because, as soon as residents are required to leave the immediate community (e.g. for supermarket shopping or hospital appointments), travel times increase considerably. Inclusion of a few higher-level services would help redress this balance.

Current Income Deprivation

There is more seasonal working in Argyll and Bute, particularly in the peripheral areas. The implication is that employment rates will be at their highest in the summer months. This coincides with the dates at which this SIMD data is collected, thereby possibly overestimating income levels in these areas.

The use of benefits data, rather than paycheck data, also raises concerns. Rural populations are less likely to claim benefits to which they are entitled than are their urban counterparts (see e.g. Philips and Shucksmith, 2003). This measure, therefore, disadvantages rural populations. (This may be, in part, due to their limited access to information, an issue touched upon above.) Many observers would expect an income data domain to include income data, but this is not the case in the SIMD.

Coarse figures showing employment statistics also mask the fact that where there is a high commuter population, simple levels of employment do not give an accurate view of the health of the local economy.

The move away from an urban biased understanding of deprivation to include a rural aspect is laudable and this needs to be upheld and broadened. This is linked to the method of measurement highlighted, but extends also to the focus of funding.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the above analysis:

- Policy and funding initiatives should aim to develop support for local communities and the local economies.
- There is a need for a continued focus on housing issues, particularly the supply of suitable land and infrastructure, supporting areas like Argyll and Bute to provide affordable housing.
- Commitment to local service provision by providers who understand the local needs, including the Scottish Executive through its policy to relocate urban jobs to more rural areas of Scotland.
- Improved understanding of the uniqueness of Argyll and Bute and recognising that policy initiatives need to be carefully framed to avoid inadvertently disadvantaging the area.

Specifically, in terms of SIMD data the inclusion / reintroduction of at least some of the following measures of access deprivation would be welcomed:

- Access to acute hospital services
- Access to banks / building societies
- Access to secondary education
- Access to Job Centre Plus
- Less reliance on benefits data and the inclusion of paycheck data.
- An examination of travel time that accounts for the reality of using ferries and the nature of local roads and driving conditions.
- The inclusion of public transport in access data.

The importance of understanding the interplay of rural and urban areas within Argyll and Bute should not be underestimated and should be factored into policy. It would be beneficial if policy developments complemented the concept of a Public Service Authority.



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