

**IONA 2013 CELEBRATIONS**

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**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1** This paper sets out the background to the Iona 2013 Celebrations and the key role the Council is playing in assisting stakeholders in preparing for this event of national importance. An associated work plan has been developed by officers within Development and Infrastructure with additional activities being developed by the Community Culture Department.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1** That members note the content of this paper.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The year 2013 marks the 1,450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of St. Columba on the Isle of Iona which is well established as the origins of Christianity in Scotland. There is growing interest in celebrating this key anniversary with the lead being taken by ‘The Iona Community’, a Scottish Christian ecumenical society, with significant input from partners such as Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland. Invitations have been issued by The Iona Community to the First Ministers of Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the President of Ireland to attend a special service of the Pentecost at Iona Abby on Sunday **19 May 2013**; the initial response from the respondents is said to be favourable.
- 2.2** Iona is a world renowned destination for its religious and cultural history and it is recorded that despite its small size, Iona attracts well in excess of 100,000 visitors every year, including many international visitors undertaking religious and non-religious pilgrimages; the population of Iona is only 150. Consequently, Iona is one of the most popular visitor destinations in Argyll and Bute and in addition, is now attracting a growing number of cruise ships.
- 2.3** There will be a series of other events on Iona from Easter to autumn during 2013 which will be widely promoted, therefore it is anticipated that there will be an increase on the number of visitors to Iona during 2013. The

Community and Culture Department are developing a series of performing arts events around Argyll and the two departments are working together for the purposes of engagement and communications.

**2.4** The 'Iona Liaison Group', a forum for stakeholders to discuss day to day land management issues in and around the island, is coordinating activities around the 2013 Celebrations. Other key stakeholders include Historic Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland who owns most of Iona, The Iona Community, Iona Community Council and Calmac. The forum meets twice a year during March and October.

**2.5** In March this year, the Liaison group established a short life working group, the '2013 Celebrations Liaison Group' to assist in the preparations of the Iona 2013 celebrations. The sub group met in May and August earlier this year and reconvened at the recent meeting of the Iona Liaison Group on the 30 October 2012.

**2.6** Taking into consideration the limited visitor infrastructure and accommodation on Iona, visitor numbers often exceed capacity during the busy seasonal periods. Critical to the management of visitors and residents to Iona is recognition of the importance of the A849 transport corridor plus the Oban to Craignure, and Fionnphort to Iona ferry services; the primary route for visitors and particularly a high number of tour buses.

**2.7** Since March this year, the Development and Infrastructure department have been liaising with key stakeholders to develop a project plan specifically for the Council to ensure that the Council plays an active role in preparing for the 2013 Celebrations. Whilst some of the actions already existed within current programmes, new proposals were developed with appropriate officers to ensure that they can be implemented within the current financial year. The key actions are as follows;

**2.8 Marine Infrastructure**

- Repairs to Iona slipway
- New ferry passenger shelter on Iona

**2.9 Roads**

- Resurface of road and car park at Iona pier head
- Refreshed white lining at Fionnphort car park
- (The A849 between Craignure and Fionnphort has been significantly been upgraded over this year.)

**2.10 Amenity**

- Internal improvements to toilets on Iona i.e. painting, new toilets etc. where required.
- Rationalisation of central recycling facilities on Iona which are

currently cluttered outside public toilet.

## 2.11 'In The Footsteps of Columba – Argyll, Cradle of Scotland'

- A partnership of community, culture and heritage organisations from along the 'Columba Way' will manage and deliver a four day festival over two weekends in four iconic locations Southend, Kimartin Glen, Dunollie House in Oban and Iona. Comar, Dunollie House, Kilmartin House Museum, The Walking Theatre Company, Three Wee Crows Theatre Company, ArtMap Argyll and The Kintyre Cultural Forum will be supported by Argyll and Bute Council and Hi~Arts in delivering the festival programme. Argyll's unique cultural heritage demands to be exploited to a national and international audience and the iconic sites for this event will start to deliver this. Working together allows us to produce something of quality and of marketable mass. This is something that has not always been possible in Argyll. We will work closely with the local tourism initiatives and with the Argyll and the Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership in gaining the best possible exposure. The variety of experiences offered by the partners will ensure a rounded event. Meetings between partners have ensured we are all working to the same artistic vision.
- Place is central to the project. The cultural economy of Argyll from Southend to Iona will benefit. As the programme is over two weekends we envisage creating overnight tourism. Each of the four locations will have participatory activities programmed.
- Columba arriving on our shores from Ireland and the legacy of that event resounds today. The sense of who we are as a nation and how we fit in to the concept of Dalriata is central to our national cultural identity. The diaspora of the Scots mean that worldwide, hundreds of thousands relate to that identity. To tell that story, created from primary source materials, in the places that it happened is meaningful. The landscape of Argyll remains fundamentally unchanged adding to the power of the experience. We will market the events internationally to bring people home.

## 2.13 .Draft Programme of Events

**Saturday 8th June: Dunollie House, Oban** A specially commissioned play, based on parts of the 'Annals of Ulster', thought to be written in the monastery on Iona. Its themes will be the Kings of Dalriata, tribal clanship and Christian conviction. In addition there will be bardic poetry in Gaelic and English. A Celtic galley (birlinn) will offer trips around the bay (possibly with on board bard). This could culminate in a crossing to Iona. There will be guided tours of Dunollie House and castle.

**Sunday 9th June: Iona** Saint Columba's Day will be celebrated with the culmination of a large scale community drama, dance and art event led by Comar. It will use as its starting point Iain Crichton Smith's 1998 play on the life of Columba which was produced by Stray Theatre and directed by Alasdair McCrone, who will be the artistic director of the Iona events.

**Saturday 15th June: Southend** There will be re-enactments of the landing of Saint Columba throughout the day. A trail of historic and folklore sites will be created and cultural events will take place at each site. The community field in the village of Southend will be the central gathering place and crafts workers will run workshops throughout the day. Historical cookery will also feature. In the evening there will be live theatre and music performances in a marquee.

**Sunday 16th June: Dunadd, Kilmartin Glen** A play centring on the meeting between Saint Columba and the Scotti Tribe which explores the imprint the man of God left on the land. This will be supported by songs and storytelling, woodwork and metalwork workshops and Viking cookery. This is important as the first Viking raid of Scotland took place at Iona in 794.

#### **2.14 Funding of Cultural Events**

We are planning on the cost of the events being £100,000. This will allow for quality of events and of marketing; generating income from ticket sales and giving the greatest possible exposure to Argyll.

We have applied to Creative Scotland for £60,000 under their Events and Festivals stream.

We have also applied to Event Scotland for £25,000 and will be submitting an application for funding to Historic Scotland in December. We will be looking for commercial sponsorship and there will be some opportunities to sell advertising. Other income will come from selling catering concessions and ticket sales should be around £10,000 across the events.

The Council's financial input will not exceed £10,000 and that will come from the Culture and Library's Culture budget.

If we fail to meet our target income from our potential funding streams, activity can be scaled back although that would restrict the benefits to be gained.

- 2.15** The Iona 2013 Celebrations provides a platform of national importance which showcases Argyll and Bute to a national and international audience. The benefits to improving the visitor infrastructure for 2013 includes increased positive media exposure.

### 3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Iona 2013 Celebrations presents a good opportunity to showcase Argyll and Bute as a destination in respect of culture, religious history and tourism to a potential national and international audience. Responsible for much of the visitor infrastructure, the Council is playing a key role in assisting partners in delivering the Iona 2013 Celebrations. In addition to the Council demonstrating investment in Argyll and Bute as a tourism destination, there is an added benefit of improved infrastructure for our residents.

### 4. IMPLICATIONS

**Policy:** Within the Corporate Plan, a strategic objective is promoting our cultural, social and natural heritage and protecting our unique area.

Within the Economic Development Action Plan a key outcome is to move the tourism industry up the value chain, extend the season and improve its profile and propositions.

**Financial:** Costs are being met from existing budgets.

**Personnel:** Officer time to deliver the actions and represent the Council at meetings on Iona.

**Equal Opportunity:** None

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