

**Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation
Argyll Beaver Centre
Business Plan 2022 – 2026**



**August 2022
by Pete Creech and Olwen Hemmings**

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1. Executive Summary

HAWO exists to promote, protect and preserve the wonderful biodiversity of Mid Argyll, and to connect people and communities with their environment through education, outreach and by providing a free drop-in visitor centre.

Over the next five years, HAWO will continue to develop and increase its impact and reach in the following ways:

- Double the numbers of members and supporters of the organisation and remove obstacles to engagement in under-represented groups
- Increase opening hours of the Centre and enhance digital engagement through improvements to the website, and increase dedicated staff time to website and social media platforms.
- Increase staff numbers to support the increase in centre opening hours and engagement in delivery of more project and community work.
- Widen the reach of the organisation giving more people access to the benefits of contact with nature which is proven to improve mental and physical well-being
- Increase Partnerships working to deliver more engagement work with schools, youth clubs, and charities supporting people with different needs
- Become more financially sustainable and resilient by generating more income through provision of extended on site visitor facilities

Knapdale - A landscape of skylines clothed in oakwoods. A profoundly evocative, ancient place with ever-changing patterns of colour, sound and smell. Views of the sea and remoteness, isolation and seclusion, a place to stay and contemplate. Exhilarating, mysterious, sometimes dramatic

2. Concept

In April 2017 The Argyll Beaver Centre opened its doors to the public. A unique, off-grid community-based wildlife centre based at the former farm buildings at Barrandaimh in Knapdale Forest. Since then, the Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation (HAWO), formed by the originators of the centre, Pete Creech and Oly Hemmings, have engaged with over 20,000 people as a result of the Centre's activities and outreach work.

Centre Services

- We have secured the use of the property at Barrandaimh as an environmental interpretation centre and promoted its potential for broad community use. The current lease runs for ten years from 2017 with a rent review due in 2022.
- We provide a Ranger-service based in Knapdale to promote, protect and maintain the biodiversity of Mid Argyll.
- We encourage wildlife, outdoor and adventure tourism that is sympathetic to the sustainability of its environments and species.
- We inform and educate the wider public of the importance of environmental conservation both locally, nationally, and in an international context.
- We engage with schools and community groups giving formal education sessions on wildlife and the environment and the many associated topics.
- We promote local sustainable development in line with the organisation's environmental principles in order to benefit local communities, business and visitors.
- We encourage local communities and organisations to participate in, and utilise the services provided.
- We encourage participation in the recording of local flora and fauna to improve knowledge of the local environment, to assist with targeting resources for its protection, and to record fluctuations occurring due to climate breakdown.
- We help conserve, sustain and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of Mid Argyll.
- We promote and facilitate the physical and mental health benefits of interaction with the natural environment.

3. Achievements to Date

Organisation Achievements 2017 - 2021:

- Fostered the economic and social well-being of local communities within Mid-Argyll.
- Improved communication and engaged with residents, community organisations, local businesses and national bodies in order to develop a well-maintained visitor infrastructure which promotes access for all sectors of society.
- Worked to forge connections with other local tourism-orientated organisations and statutory bodies in the firm belief that cooperative working is vital to improve the tourist experience in this area.
- Established the centre as a family orientated destination hub, field studies centre and community space.
- Increased the number and breadth of volunteering opportunities in Knapdale.
- Actively promoted Mid Argyll's natural environment across all media outlets, both nationally and locally through multiple television and radio broadcasts and via a variety of social media channels.
- Directly interacted with over 20,000 people through the centre and via our events and activities.
- Made major strides to becoming a wholly sustainable organization. Our water is from a local natural source and all of our electricity is provided by solar PV. 50% of our core salary costs are maintained by unrestricted, earned income
- Become the most popular choice for those wishing to view beavers in Scotland: 12 years of being involved with this species and the physical proximity of their territories to the centre has allowed us to provide a matchless experience that incorporates education, guided walks, viewing opportunities and up-to-date, face-to-face information.
- Delivered and also facilitated a range of training courses and community-based activities alongside commercial wildlife tourism services.
- Delivered a regular seasonal programme of guided walks and events.
- Provided a range of high-quality volunteering opportunities from local conservation work to hosting FE and HE students.
- Provided a system of hides and wildlife cameras to facilitate the viewing of some of our iconic species such as pine marten, red squirrel and badger.

4. Future Development

Aims & Objectives 2022 - 2027:

- To take ownership of the Buildings and surrounding land to enable us to develop our organisation's objectives more swiftly and remove barriers to funding.
- To further develop Barrandaimh as a wildlife interpretation and information centre to accrue ongoing community and commercial benefit.
- To consolidate and expand our range of guided walks and community-based events in our seasonal programme.
- Develop a dynamic management plan and marketing and communications strategy.
- Have 150 members by the end of 2024.
- Increase our regular volunteer numbers and provide high quality volunteering opportunities, creating three additional posts by 2025.
- Further develop our formal education offering to local schools (in class lessons and site visits) to fulfil the increasing demand for our services.
- To initiate a local annual wildlife festival working with a wide range of community and statutory organisations by summer 2025.
- Continue to develop sources of secure unreserved income through partnership with wildlife tourism operators.
- Continue to source funding for environmental projects.
- Investigate the concept of a local tourism tax in partnership with other local tourism destinations.
- Expand environmental consultancy capacity, particularly in relation to the expected increase in beaver relocations following the 2022 change in legislation.
- Assist other community groups as facilitators, using our broad experience of community-based organisations to guide and advise groups through incorporation and its associated legislation.
- Initiate further improvements to the barn to reduce its exposure to the prevailing winds via screening by 2023.
- Renovate and bring into use the remaining built space throughout the centre for education, community, interpretation, event, exhibition and storage uses.

In order to meet the Aims and Objectives outlined above, we will develop our organisation using the following methods:

Earned Income

We will work to increase our earned (unrestricted) income to allow us to match fund grant funding applications to deliver the expanded range of offerings by the organization and/or part fund a future member of staff. We will require another member of staff to enable us to expand the organization as set out in our Aims and Objectives. Income will be generated by the following actions:

- Development of Barrandaimh as a multi-use training centre for stakeholder organisations and others.
- Enter into more commercial partnerships with other activity providers, expanding the work we already do with Wilderness Scotland.

- Further develop and expand our programme of public paid for walks and events.
- Capitalise on increased E-Bike usage and investigate the potential of a hire scheme, and in partnership with other local organisations/business to provide charging facilities at the centre and around the local area.
- Offer student field trips to universities, colleges and other organisations for groups wishing to study ecology or other countryside-based subjects.
- Investigate the possibility of group accommodation in the separate bothy building.
- Continue to develop use of the hide for wildlife-viewing and photography
- Provide a simple camping pod giving the public an accommodation option allowing them to stay overnight with close access to the wildlife hide and beaver lochs.
- Investigate other small-scale revenue raising activities to provide as broad an income base as possible.

Community

Through the employment of a Development Officer we will gain more organisation time to progress working with community groups and meet more of the demand from the community.

- Create a permanent wheelchair-friendly path from the car park to the centre door and down to the barn.
- Continue to develop and form new working partnerships with local and national organisations with similar community development and environmental priorities, that will forward the charitable purposes of the organisation.
- Encourage greater use of the centre by community groups by raising awareness of its availability and via a realistic hire charge.
- Develop online and face-to-face educational resources alongside an enhanced education programme within Mid Argyll.
- Increase the number of volunteer opportunities available to both local residents and those from outside the area with an interest in our core activities.
- Make the other buildings on-site suitable for community and education-themed events, exhibitions and courses.

Environment

- Foster enthusiasm for, and participation in, citizen science projects that aim to record species numbers and distribution and the effects of climate breakdown.
- Continue to monitor species of particular interest in regard to reintroduction/reinforcement in Argyll, in particular: beavers, European oysters and water voles.
- Instigate a programme of mink-monitoring and control in line with invasive non-native species initiatives

Volunteering

By increasing the centre opening days/hours with an extra member of staff (Development Officer), we will enable more options for volunteering. Utilising volunteers' existing skills will aid in the expansion of the offering of the organisation, while increasing training opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills will aid us in conducting the work that we do. Having more volunteers to aid in the day-to-day running of the centre will free up staff time to focus on other revenue raising tasks such as:

Site and Property Development

Ownership of the asset will greatly reduce the time and administration processes to progress onsite development projects by reducing the current communication triangle between HAWO, Forestry & Land Scotland and NatureScot, to just between HAWO and NatureScot. Once ownership of the asset is acquired development plans are as follows:

- Establish the conservation status of the bat colony in the bothy to assess whether a false ceiling can be installed to minimize disturbance and allow use of the building for community event space. As this is a long term plan it is difficult to establish costs as, although the building is in a reasonable state of repair, the major outlay may be any mitigation that may take place in order to nullify disturbance of bats at the time of the study. We anticipate a cost of £1,500 for the study. Ownership of the asset will simplify and reduce agency involvement in discussions with HAWO. The bothy will be ideal for smaller-scale community events and exhibitions etc, being both an intimate space and a culturally significant building.
- Creating more display and shop space in the centre by relocating office space/storage into the loft. We have recently replaced the roof and added Velux roof lights giving more potential to development of the upstairs space. Historically this floor was used for bedrooms and this would represent another step in bringing the building back to full functionality. The ability to display more within the centre will enable us to host more engaging exhibits, activities and expand our merchandise range increasing our unreserved revenue. Ownership will again simplify this process as funders are often reluctant to engage in capital works for rented properties. The basic fitting-out of the loft space will require new flooring, insulation and dry-lining. The likely initial cost is around £3,500.
- One of our most ambitious aims is to convert the byre (attached to the centre) into an education space and as exemplar for the Centre's heritage, renewable energy use and carbon-neutral status. The byre is of traditional Argyll construction and will lend itself to both the community story of the building to date (we have a record of an individual being born here in 1680) and as a demonstration of the benefits of renewable energy. We will incorporate simple, interactive non-electronic displays that show the cost and implications of the use of various types of energy in relation to renewable sources. The facility will be used for curriculum-based school/community activities, as well as another attraction for visitors, many of whom are unaware that we are entirely off-grid.
- Overhaul lighting in both centre (both floors) and byre.

- Installation of a simple, small accommodation pod, as stated in the Earned Income section, will be a revenue-raiser for HAWO, allowing visitors, wishing to use the wildlife hide both late evening and early morning, to stay on-site in close proximity to the hide and the beaver loch. The initial outlay is approx. £15,000 and ownership of the centre will assist accessing funding for construction work for a permanent structure, as funders are less likely to support this development of a rented property.
- The installation of a shower in the compost loo building will add necessary facilities to complement the accommodation pod.
- Works to improve drainage and surface of the drive/track and install additional passing places will facilitate improved ease of visitors arriving by car. Due to the length of the drive and the fact that it falls out with our ownership any major works will have to be agreed with FLS. However, we already have agreement from NatureScot for a suitable location for a new passing place.

Tourism

As stated in previous sections, the physical developments of the site and buildings will support the rise in numbers visiting the centre. Further ways in which we will grow HAWO in this section are:

- Continue to play a key role in promoting local tourism businesses through our membership of and work with the local destination marketing group.
- Secure contract with travel trade for bespoke guided walks. Due to long lead-in this will allow long-term planning for future provision.

Community Asset transfer

As mentioned previously, ownership of the asset is integral in fulfilling many of the aims outlined in the sections above. We will complete a Community Asset Transfer to bring the buildings and land associated with Barrandaimh into community ownership.

We believe that acquisition of the asset will:

- Future-proof and secure both our organisation and the asset and facilities beyond the normal terms of any current lease agreements.
- Ownership will reduce legal and administration costs and charges brought about by lease changes.
- Ownership will secure the long-term future of the organisation and provide a buffer against any unforeseen organisational and policy changes within FLS that might threaten the security of tenure.
- In addition, having brought the buildings to a satisfactory state of repair, ownership will safeguard current and future investments in the structure of the property and the employment this will create.
- Longer-term planning can be initiated with a greater degree of confidence and will enable the creation of a permanent community space.
- Enable us to apply for funding for a Development Officer and other future funding bids. Ownership of the asset will allow HAWO to access funding streams that previously have been unavailable due to lower than required turnover of the organisation.

HAWO Development Officer Position

The Development Officer post will be one new full-time position (or 2 part-time). We anticipate a salary of £22,000/annum and intend to seek funding for a minimum 3-year contract of employment.

Principle role:

- To increase community engagement, promote the centre as a community resource
- meet the needs we are being asked by the community to fulfil (e.g. investigate reasons and mitigation methods for frequent otter deaths on village road)
- Develop areas of interest for future expansion within HAWO
- Working from the centre will free-up time for other staff to implement these plans and will also allow staff and volunteers to coordinate to open the centre for more days per week and stay open when other staff are off site delivering in school education or hosting off site events etc.
- Progress the initiatives within this plan and seek a broad spectrum of targeted appropriate funding to carry them out.
- Investigate ways to maximising unreserved income
- Improving our social media presence, and maintain the website
- Develop our management plan and implement a responsive marketing and communication strategy.

5. Operational Plan 2022-2026

YEAR	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Asset Transfer					
Accommodation pod					
Development worker					
Byre redevelopment					
Store redevelopment					
Travel trade bookings					
Enclose barn face					
Volunteer development					
Track upgrade					
Centre development					
Increased community use					
Ranger service					
Education development					
Enhanced membership scheme					
Income diversification					
Environmental restoration					
Contract work					
Assess loft space for office					
Prioritise multi-year funding					

 Necessary actions
 Desired actions

6. Organisation Summary

Legal Structure

HAWO is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). There are currently five trustees who meet a minimum of four times per year. The AGM is held in December.

Management Structure and Team

The five trustees have extensive experience in the fields of wildlife tourism, governance, management of charity finances, environmental consultancy, mental health, outdoor activity management, land purchase, funding, outdoor access, biological recording, and risk management.

Co-Founders Pete Creech and Olwen Hemmings have a broad knowledge of the area and its wildlife and previous experience of working in similar activities and projects. These include The Scottish Beaver Trial, and more recently Scottish Beavers. Both have degree qualifications in Geography, Rural Development and Countryside Management. Both teach a range of environmental subjects at Argyll College/UHI at Higher, HNC and HND level.

Company Address

C/O Crown House
Ford
By Lochgilphead
Argyll
PA31 8RH

Phone number: 07827 965010

Website: argyllbeavercentre.co.uk

Membership

Membership and voting rights are open to all within the Mid Argyll area for the sum of £10 per year (concessions available). For those living outside the area there is an option to become a supporter of the organisation, also for £10 per year. We operate a rolling year; an applicant's membership begins on the day the application is received.

Partners and Stakeholders

Forestry and Land Scotland
Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance
British Trust for Ornithology
Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation
Kilmartin Museum
NatureScot
Scottish Canals
Scottish Countryside Rangers Association
Visit Scotland (We are a Visit Scotland Tourist Information Partner).
Artmap Argyll
Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative
North Knapdale Community Council
Lochgilphead Scouts

Policies and Procedures

Children and Vulnerable Adults

The Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation acknowledges our duty of care to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. We are committed to ensuring our safeguards reflect statutory responsibilities and comply with best practice and Disclosure Scotland requirements.

We recognise that the welfare and interests of children and vulnerable adults are paramount.

We aim to ensure that regardless of age, gender, religion or beliefs, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or socioeconomic background, all children and vulnerable adults have a positive and enjoyable experience in a safe environment and are protected from abuse whilst participating in any activity we provide. We both have current PVG clearance.

Health and Safety

Our statement of general policy is:

To provide adequate control of the health and safety risks arising from our work activities.

To consult with our users and volunteers on matters affecting their health and safety.

To provide and maintain safe conditions for all users of the site and to review and revise this policy as necessary at regular intervals

To ensure safe manual handling and use of substances/materials.

To provide information, instruction and supervision for volunteers.

To ensure all volunteers are competent to do their tasks, and to give them adequate Training and supervision.

To prevent accidents and cases of work-related ill health.

In addition:

A risk register is maintained on an ongoing basis.

Site-specific method statements and risk assessments will be produced. Specific statements and assessments will also be produced for events, activities, walks and workshops held by HOAWO.

Outside users will be required to submit appropriate method statements and risk assessments prior to any use of the site being permitted.

An accident book and appropriate first-aid equipment will be available on-site and their locations clearly marked.

Both of the founders have appropriate and up-to-date outdoor first-aid and open-water rescue certificates.

Environmental policy

HAWO is committed to the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance, recovery and reintroduction of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings.

We aim to be a carbon-neutral organisation through:

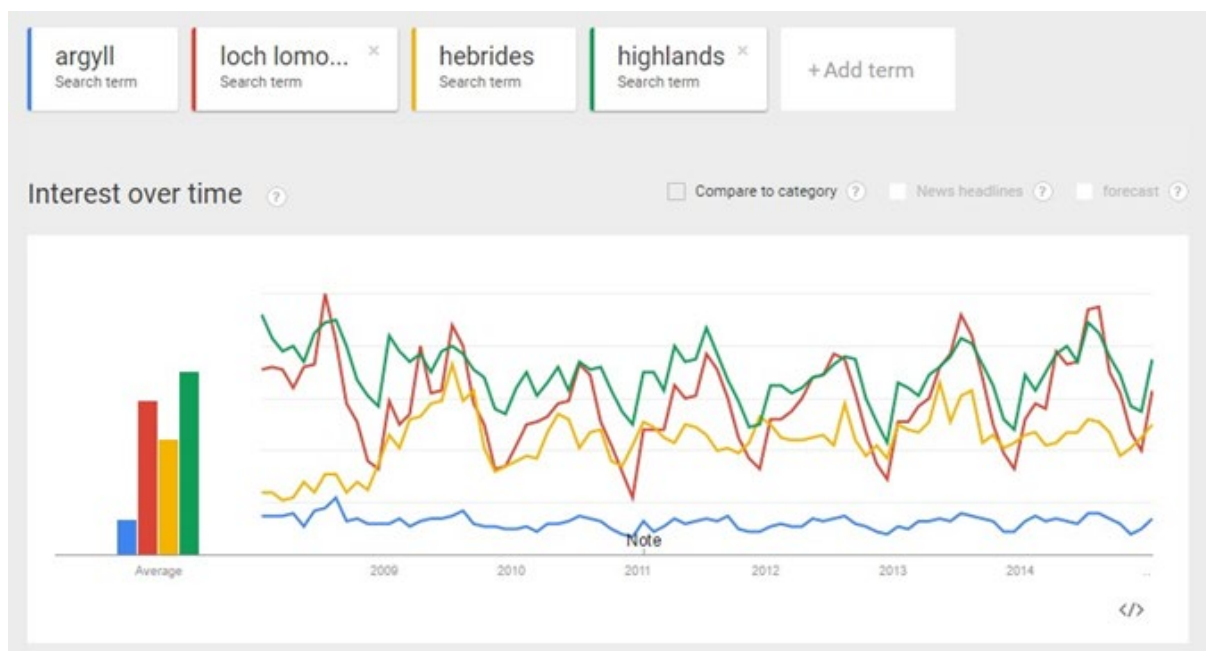
- Engagement with all staff and volunteers on-site.
- Practical use of 'waste' items to minimize need for recycling or transfer of waste to landfill.
- All green waste is composted on site.
- Maximum use of renewable energy. All our power is produced by solar PV.
- Use of our own water source.
- Use of the composting toilet on site.
- Maximum use of energy efficient products.
- Promotion of the local bus service from Tayvallich/Lochgilphead
- We promote cycling; provide cycle parking and information regarding cycle trails and the capacity of local buses to carry bicycles. We commute to our place of work on e-bikes.
- We stock products from companies actively promoting sustainable resources where possible.
- We use local suppliers and workers for the fitting out and maintenance of the centre.
- We comply with the requirements of environmental legislation and approved codes of practice, as well as seeking to improve our environmental and social performance.
- We aim to minimise pollution/emissions and waste, reduce the use of energy, water and other resources, and raise awareness and encourage participation of all visitors and volunteers in sustainable environmental practices. We expect similar environmental standards from all suppliers and contractors.
- Visitors will be assisted to treat the site and surrounding environment in a sustainable and sensitive manner and we will liaise with the local community in order to promote and share good environmental practice.
- Through our membership of HOATA we will encourage other tourism businesses to minimise their environmental impact and advise on good practice.

7. Background

Overview

Tourism expenditure in Scotland was £11.5 billion in 2019 (VisitScotland). £1.4 billion of this was generated by nature-based tourism (NatureScot 2014). The tourism sector in Scotland generated a growth of 5% in 2019. Nationally it employs 5% of the population, in Argyll the figure is nearer 15% (Argyll & Bute Council). However, awareness of Argyll as a tourism destination in general, and as an eco-tourism location in particular, remains low. The graph below shows the number of Internet 'search hits' for Argyll compared to other areas of Scotland. Destination marketing is now managed by the Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative and the Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance, with a commitment to ensuring this area receives a market share in line with other comparable regions of Scotland.

Pete Creech is currently chair of The Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance, Olwen Hemmings is a director



Knapdale

Barrandaimh is located within the Knapdale National Scenic Area; one of an impressive list of environmental designations accredited to the Mid Argyll area. It is also situated adjacent to the site of the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) that ran from 2009 to 2014. The SBT (and subsequently Scottish Beavers) has helped to showcase this area's stunning biodiversity to the wider public.

Despite the media interest, much of the tourism potential remains unrealised. The beavers remain in the spotlight and it has largely fallen to the authors of this report to manage and maintain this interest. This has manifested itself with appearances on BBC's Countryfile, The One Show, BBC Alba, Radio Scotland's 'Out of Doors', CBeebies, and Channel 5's Secret Scotland. We featured in The Scots Magazine, the French 'Society' magazine and The Times. We also worked with the National History Museum to highlight the wildlife viewing possibilities in the area and in the production of a 360-degree film of one of our beaver

walks. We feature in Ben Goldfarb's book 'Eager' on the history of beaver/human interactions. We are regular contributors to Oban FM's community radio shows. We were contracted to RZSS to monitor the further release of beavers into Knapdale until 2020.

We have secured a regular space on Wilderness Scotland's touring itinerary to provide guided walks to their customers. This is proving to be a growing revenue stream as our walks now feature on two of their regular Scottish tours

Mid Argyll's wildlife tourism potential is obvious; a greater range of species than many of the existing Scottish wildlife 'hotspots', proximity to the Central Belt, its mainland location and compact geographical area.

The Scottish Government decision to incorporate beavers as a native species in December 2016, their enhanced legal protection from early 2022 and further potential releases nationwide can only enhance the potential opportunities.

Mid Argyll has internationally significant natural resources which are under-recorded and under-used; there is much scope to improve visitor numbers and eco-tourism. Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance (HOATA), a destination marketing organisation that was formed in 2011, is looking at ways to bring more people to the area in conjunction with the umbrella organisation Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC). Current priorities include a major upgrading of signage and the provision of tourist information following Visit Scotland's decision to close all but one of its centres in Argyll.

The ruined buildings of a small farm at Barrandaimh, owned by the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), were renovated by the Argyll Green Woodworkers Association (AGWA) in 2000, adding impressive features such as off grid power, a composting toilet and a cruck frame barn. It holds a gateway position to the Knapdale National Scenic Area and would lend itself to a wide range of community and other uses.

Mid Argyll, and Knapdale in particular, is considered by botanists, geologists, zoologists, archaeologists, photographers, tour guides and visitors to be a world class landscape for the study and enjoyment of nature. Integral to this is the sea and the varied coastline. Much of Knapdale is covered by national and international conservation designations. In addition, Loch Sween and the Sound of Jura south to Point of Knap are designated as Marine Protected Areas. The Sound of Jura has recently been awarded an international 'hope Spot' designation by Mission Blue, the first of its kind in UK waters and emphasising both the diversity and fragility of this unique habitat. Under water, the wealth of natural resources rivals that on land.

This National Scenic Area's topography of ridges and glens, from which the Norse name Knapdale is derived, produces diverse and contained habitats. (It was partly for this reason that the trial introduction of European beavers to the UK was located here.) Visitors do not have to travel far to experience a striking variety of landscapes.

There are opportunities

to encounter "The Big Five" species: red deer, red squirrel, golden eagle, otter, and harbour seal. Ospreys regularly fly over the centre.

The rapid transition from hills of 500 metres through moorland, bog and woodland, to estuary, salt marsh and shore provide an incredible mix of species. In few other places can the song of birds from all these habitats be heard at the same time.

Activities

Knapdale's economy, in common with much of rural Argyll, has a higher proportion of people working in farming, forestry, fisheries, the public sector and tourism than the Scottish average. However, the majority of jobs are based in the service sector.

The tourism sector is primarily focused upon outdoor activities, embracing the area's archaeological, environmental, artistic and cultural heritage.

Accommodation is dominated by holiday lets and smaller hotels and guest houses. There is currently a lack of simpler accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts, bothies and campsites in the area; tourists experience difficulties in accessing this type of accommodation in the peak months.

“Under 10%. The number of children who regularly play in natural places.” (Department of Health)

8. Need:

Secure the Beaver Centre's future, continue to raise its profile and increase financial support and partnership-working from government and statutory bodies.

In Mid Argyll there is:

- An opportunity to further develop formal environmental education programmes for schools and other education groups alongside key stakeholders
- A lack of wet weather attractions and public-toilet facilities.
- Little in the way of tourist information and a lack of/or outdated tourist destination signage.

The Argyll Beaver Centre serves as a:

- Centre for arts/culture/history/nature-based workshops and activities for both local and national organisations.
- Centre for the advertising and operation of commercial wildlife enterprises.
- Centre for environmental-based volunteering and biological-recording activities.
- Place for the delivery of formal and informal education.
- Catalyst for healthy activities for the local community and visitors via walking, foraging and mindfulness, and the opportunity to enjoy and celebrate the health benefits of natural places.
- Centre for outdoor activities for local Cub, Scout, Duke of Edinburgh Award and other community groups.
- Centre for outdoor learning for younger children.
- Tourist information centre.

Barrandaimh provides economic benefit to local businesses. Due to our environmental remit and charitable status, we have access to grant sources not usually available to other community-led organisations in Mid Argyll. As a result, there is the opportunity to lever additional income into the local economy benefitting businesses directly and indirectly involved with the project.

We provide an information and rest point for local and one national wildlife businesses allowing their customers to access toilet facilities, hot drinks and somewhere to dry out! The formal education programme provided by the SBT and Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) Education Ranger is no longer available since the cessation of the post. There was a high level of demand for the lessons offered which covered many aspects of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. A number of local schools indicated they would like to continue to use such a service, as evidenced in the feasibility study. With the resumption of such activities following the ongoing beaver releases we are well placed, and directly involved. Since our inception we have expanded our curriculum-based activities by producing learning materials that include marine environments and intend to work in close co-operation with Seawilding and the Argyll Hope Spot (for whom we have produced both classroom-based and outdoor learning activities). We have received requests to work in Lochaber and have

interacted with one school here, but we will need to lever in more funding to afford this on a wider basis or for us to enable the local community to deliver these lessons.

9. Marketing

Strategic fit

An interpretation and wildlife centre based at Barrandaimh has been up and running since April 2017.

Ongoing funding is available for such initiatives if a strategic approach is followed. The asset transfer, currently in progress (August 2022) is fundamental to this process.

The long-term goal will be for the project to be self-sustaining for core costs. This could be achieved by an ongoing programme to establish a well-resourced centre.

Short term activities are already being funded and run both independently and in conjunction with other organisations (such as various projects, most recently one to investigate otter deaths on the A816 in conjunction with Craignish Community Council and funded by Argyll and Bute Council's Community Fund).

Environmental Economic and Social Benefits

Environmental

Alongside other voluntary groups and social enterprises we will continue to fill the gap created by the lack of a county-wide ranger service and will promote sensible use and care of the countryside as outlined in Scottish outdoor access legislation.

Through the promotion of biological recording and citizen science we aim to better understand the breadth of the area's biodiversity and any changes that occur over time. We will also continue to investigate the opportunities for habitat restoration. Recent examples include our collaboration with Seawilding to restore the native oyster beds in Loch Craignish and survey work to establish the extent and numbers of mink within North Knapdale.

Economic

Through the ongoing development of wildlife tourism, Mid Argyll could accrue considerable local economic benefit in line with that experienced by other areas of Scotland, particularly those that have been the subject of species reintroductions. The reintroduction of the Eurasian beaver has proven to be a significant opportunity having raised the profile of all of the area's diverse wildlife. With a fascinating biodiversity and complex network of habitats, within a compact area, Mid Argyll can rival established wildlife tourism centres such as Mull and the National Parks.

Social

In 2018 the economic and social cost of mental ill health in Scotland was estimated at £10.7 billion. Numerous studies have shown the positive effects on mental wellbeing of our green spaces. 15 minutes is the time taken to reduce blood pressure, pulse rate and cortisol levels during a walk-in deciduous woodland. (*Japanese Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute*). In regard to physical health, the Department of Health predicts that 25% of children under 16 will be obese by 2050. The above figures are pre-pandemic.

In response the Scottish Government has committed to providing life-enhancing outdoor play and learning for all of Scotland's children (*Scottish Govt. 2020*).

The promotion of healthy outdoor activity, a process we have established with the Lochgilphead Scouts, Cubs and Beavers, local primary schools and through our walks programme, are core objectives of the organisation.

The benefits of access to green space are disproportionately large among lower income and vulnerable groups and we will continue to keep our facilities and services as accessible as possible.

The creation of a group of volunteers, who assist in a range of roles at the centre played a significant part in reducing social isolation during the pandemic.

We will promote the theme of 'Inclusive Tourism' currently being rolled out by Visit Scotland and explore how we can best provide for visitors with disabilities. This has included practical adaptations to the site and investigating if the wheelchair accessible boat on Loch Barnluasgan can be reinstated with a view to using it for wildlife watching experiences for wheelchair users.

Market Research

Initial research was informed by the feasibility study carried out in December 2015. This provided the basis for a successful application to the National Lottery's Investing in Ideas grant scheme and further funding (2017-21) from:

The Community Landfill Fund

A' Chruach Windfarm (2 awards).

UnLtd 'Start Up' and 'Grow It' social enterprise awards.

Argyll and Bute Council Community Fund (3 awards)

The Craignish Trust (2 awards)

Tesco Bags of Help fund

Co-op Community Fund

ACHA

Forestry and Land Scotland

Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation

NatureScot

Peoples Postcode Trust

This funding has allowed us to run the centre, initiate repairs and pilot a variety of projects based around the Barrandaimh site during 2016-22 to include business planning and governance, interpretation, development of walks and events, piloting of volunteer group and Ranger service, familiarisation visits, extensive repairs to the centre's buildings and infrastructure, and the installation of a solar array that provides all of our electricity, a vital buffer against the volatile energy market.

Attendance and presenting at the Crinan Canal Corridor Development Charrette enabled a wider community view of the economic development potential that could transpire through partnership working with the Charrette's participants.

Ongoing community consultation will help inform the potential for various activities including habitat restoration, workshops, citizen science projects and volunteer activities.

We have created a walks and events database to help better inform the need for particular types of activities such as bespoke walks and themed events.

Continued liaison with other environmental groups to maximize benefit to both, e.g. we are currently working with:

Craignish Community Council to investigate the high number of otter deaths on the A816, Seawilding and five local primary schools monitoring the growth and development of native oysters in Loch Craignish.

The Argyll Hope Spot developing lesson materials to highlight our unique marine biodiversity.

SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <p>Location. Unique, multi-purpose venue. Low rental cost for first ten years. Proximity to other local attractions: National Nature Reserves, Crinan Canal etc. Biodiversity: Big 5+. Beavers Existing infrastructure; Barrandaimh buildings and contents, cycle and walking trails, all-abilities access trail. Sustainability: Off-grid/cost effective and buffer against rising energy prices. Broad base of support from local community groups. Comprehensive data legacy of Scottish Beaver Trial and Dalriada Project. Scottish Government decision to allow wider beaver reintroduction. Undercover venue with toilet facilities for community and visitor use. Local knowledge and experience of founders. Appropriately skilled Trustees.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <p>Perceived remoteness. Access track and cost of maintenance. Environmental and FLS/SNH constraints. Continuity/availability of board members. Lack of footpath link to Crinan Canal. Limited signage. Weather. Seasonality. Maintenance costs. Public transport link. Initial reliance on external funding. Initial lack of 'presence'</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>Base for Ranger service and guided walks. Hire of centre for events, workshops, courses, gallery space Information centre benefitting local tourism community/economy. Partnership with local ecotourism businesses to provide unreserved income stream. Employment of development officer. Interpretation and education facility. Model of good practice for renewable energy sources. Point of contact for sustained interest in beavers/resultant increased visitor numbers. Broad range of potential funders. Continuation of environmental education programme initiated by SWT. Opportunity for partnership working to improve the visitor experience along the Crinan Canal corridor. Capitalise on interest in rewilding/species reintroduction. Consultancy work</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>Lack of time to do everything! Vandalism. Unexpected costs Availability of ongoing core funding. Lack of rental income. Reduction/loss of public transport link due to Council cuts. Cost of signage and permissions. Poor response to formation of volunteer group. Curtailment of EU funding sources resulting from UK exit. Lack of ongoing financial support from Argyll and Bute Council and national environmental agencies. Environmental activities regarded as free or cheap by general public. A perception not helped by free provision from centrally funded organisations</p>

Marketing Strategy

- Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.
We currently have 2,350-page followers and 2,500 group members on Facebook, 689 Twitter followers and 1,181 on Instagram. Posted wildlife videos from our trail cameras frequently achieve a reach in excess of 5,000. (November 2022)
- Information leaflet advertising the visitor centre as a tourist destination.
- Posters for targeted advertising for events and walks.
- Networking and destination marketing – links with HOATA and AITC, accommodation and activity providers etc. Links shared with Forest and Land Scotland and Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Face-to face direct marketing through walks and events. We are our own best advert!
- The continued exploitation of the national media interest in species reintroduction and rewilding.
- Working with FLS, HOATA and Argyll and Bute Council to implement effective signage to the site.
- Attending local and regional events and festivals.
- Selling branded merchandise.
- Targeting our leaflets etc. at 'gateway' points to Mid Argyll – working with organisations such as Wild Argyll, Kilmelford Holiday Village, tour operators and small-scale cruise providers etc.
- Initiate discussions with other local tourism providers as to the feasibility of the implementation of a local 'tourist tax'.

10. Finance

Financial Projections and Outputs

See Five Year Predicted Cash Flow sheet – Appendix 1.

We have split each year into seasons to reflect the work pattern for this type of enterprise.

Grant Income

£8,620 from National Lottery's Investing in Ideas fund in order to pilot the first/second years' objectives of the original 5-year business plan.

Argyll and Bute Council Third Sector Fund, £610 to initiate a summer walks programme and £1,100 for Crinan Canal activities.

£12,000 from Alt Chruach windfarm fund for 2 years part-payment of salary for 2 p/t Wildlife Officers and a further £5,000 for repairs,

£10,000 from Community Landfill Fund for track upgrade and disabled access improvements.

£4,000 from UnLtd Scotland to develop social enterprise aspects and £15,000 for business development.

£640 from Forestry Commission Scotland to develop formal education lessons in conjunction with Kilmartin Museum.

£900 from Craignish Trust for outreach education.

£11,464 from Co-op Community Fund.

£1,000 from Tesco Bags for Help

£954 from Argyll and Bute Council's Supporting Communities Fund for native oyster reintroduction monitoring.

£5,400 from Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation to investigate the practicality of a water vole reintroduction

£2,000 from NatureScot to monitor mink numbers

£20,000 of Covid support funding from various agencies

£12,000 from People's Postcode Trust for core costs

£22,000 over 5 years to implement native oyster education programme, host events and carry out evaluation via Seawilding's Heritage Lottery funding

£500 from ACHA to part fund a defibrillator at the FLS Barnluasgan car-park (plus in-kind support from FLS 'recreation team')

Current unreserved/sales Income

We have accrued unreserved income through:

3-year contract with RZSS for monitoring of 2017-20 beaver release programme.

Environmental monitoring work. Most recently working with DWS Associates and Tobermory Harbour Board to assess the environmental impacts of the community-owned board's plans for economic development of the Aros Estate.

Charges levied for our guided walks programme and bespoke walks to specialist groups.

Sale of merchandise.

Memberships

Donations

Contingency

Despite our initial successes we are under no illusion as to the difficulties of sourcing longer-term funding, particularly in regard to core costs. However, there is sufficient flexibility within this plan to be able to deliver a range of the proposed activities if larger-scale funding is either delayed or unavailable during the five years covered. Assuming a successful asset transfer the low maintenance and service costs associated with the site will still allow HOAWO to operate at a reduced level and still provide a range of community and other benefits.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

We will measure progress by:

- Recording visitor numbers to the centre.
- Recording numbers, and gauge satisfaction and increased understanding from people attending Barrandaimh, events, talks etc. through evaluation forms.
- Progress on implementing, improving and informing of wildlife tourism opportunities. Monitored through the uptake of activities offered and advertised and through promotion of special offer schemes.
- Number of opportunities created for training and employment.
- Measure whether local residents understand the role of HOAWO and the work which we do via community consultation and via feedback at events/walks.
- Evaluating the level of engagement with communities in regard to importance of conservation and recording of species within Knapdale.
- Increased take up of volunteering opportunities and numbers in volunteer group
- Feedback from teachers and schools following events and education sessions.
- The amount of media coverage Knapdale receives.
- The number of followers on Twitter/Facebook, website hits, email enquiries.
- Number of people engaged with at local shows.
- Keeping a cash balance spreadsheet to monitor income and expenditure.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1

5-year cashflow.