

The Herald

£90m makeover to transform the forgotten towns of Argyll

They were once thriving tourist destinations for thousands of Glasgow families.

Now Argyll's forgotten seaside towns are to be given a multi-million pound makeover in a bid to revive their flagging fortunes.

Dunoon, Helensburgh, Campbeltown, Oban and Rothesay will be redeveloped in a £90m plan to breathe new life into their neglected seafronts. Proposals for pier developments, marinas, traffic management and public walkways have been drawn up for the towns in Argyll and Bute.

The plans range from a £2m feasibility study for Campbeltown to a £40m plan to transform the promenade and pier area of Helensburgh.

The hordes of Glaswegian holidaymakers have long forsaken the picturesque seaside resorts on their doorstep for the costas, and even the weekend break trade has suffered with cheap flights opening up the rest of Europe.

Rothesay has long since said goodbye to the guaranteed income of the summer months and you are more likely to see residents of Helensburgh commuting to the city for work than Glaswegians escaping to the sea in the other direction.

Dunoon suffered its biggest blow when the Americans withdrew from their submarine base at Holy Loch in the 1990's taking their spending power with them.

For years many have wanted to see the towns given major investment.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, former Nato Secretary General, and ex-UK defence secretary who lives in Argyll, said: "The town centres and shop fronts are seen first and last by tourists and form a lasting impression of the country for visitors.

"So revitalising these town centres is very much a part of growing Scotland's tourist trade."

A report to councillors, from council officials, states: "Progressing town centre and waterfront projects is likely to place a significant demand on resources both in terms of officer time and budget.

"The council has limited resources and it is inevitable that there will be a scarcity of resources to allow all the projects to progress simultaneously. It is therefore essential that the council establish a priority order for the town centre and waterfront regeneration projects."

In Dunoon, a refurbishment of Queen's Hall and the pier, which are council owned, are the main elements, and plans for a marina which is likely to be privately funded are hoped to improve the area's profile and entice more people to the town.

Following a scoring exercise focusing on the impact of the projects balanced by the affordability and the associated risks of taking no action, Dunoon came out as the top priority and plans are expected to be put in place there first.

Helensburgh, Argyll's largest town, will concentrate on traffic management to improve traffic flow through the town.

The £40m estimate is the largest of the five projects and improvements will also be made to the waterfront and area around the pier.

Campbeltown is to have a study into how the town can attract and retain new skilled workers and create jobs, as well as pulling in high-spending visitors.

Oban is seeking to establish itself as the undisputed regional centre of the west Highlands and improve its roads and water infrastructure.

Developments will concentrate on the waterfront area around the railway station and ferry terminal, the esplanade and Oban Bay. Rothesay's A-listed Pavilion, once the favourite haunt of holidaymakers, will be at the centre of the regeneration programme.

Plans to bring disused buildings back into use and developing on gap sites aim to put the island town back on the map for retail, leisure and entertainment.

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By *STEWART PATERSON*

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