



# Oban: A University Town

Project Scoping and Consultation Document  
Vision and Strategic Objectives



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## VISION FOR OBAN AS A UNIVERSITY TOWN

The Oban University Town Project was established in August 2017 and launched in January 2018 with the following aspirational vision:

“We will develop Oban as a University Town that will focus on the distinctive assets and employment opportunities of the area and provide an outstanding experience for students and staff in terms of teaching, practical work, enterprise, leisure and cultural activities and community engagement.

This will contribute to the economic and population growth of the area by attracting and retaining young people and qualified staff and enhance creativity, innovation, and the formation and growth of local businesses.”

The project to-date has included input and resourcing from a number of partners identified on the back of this document, however input from others is welcomed at any stage as the project progresses to ensure the best possible delivery for Oban’s future.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

*There are many exciting activities taking place across the project, however some of the key overlapping objectives include:*

- ➔ Giving school leavers and young people more choice about their futures, with Oban as attractive an option as other towns and cities;
- ➔ Attracting students to come to Oban, gradually increasing the demand for local services and contributing to the town’s economy;
- ➔ Reviewing infrastructure requirements including transport, accommodation and the social / cultural scene, particularly considering the seasonality of tourism;
- ➔ Matching educational opportunities to the economic priorities for Argyll and Bute, ensuring that the offer includes degree courses, vocational training and modern apprenticeships to help local employers recruit the skilled workforce they need; and
- ➔ Making sure that students and residents have a fantastic experience in Oban and that growth is delivered in a planned and sustainable way.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project is overseen by a Steering Committee with responsibility for strategic oversight and management. Four Project Teams (**Academic Offer; Infrastructure; Business Needs and Opportunities; and Communications**) have been developed and will be working to deliver the ambitious commitments outlined further in this plan. Project managers work between the Steering Committee and Project Teams to ensure a collaborative approach and efficient delivery.

The involvement of students and young people will also be crucial in the delivery of the project over coming years. A student representatives group will provide a forum for input from current and future students to ensure the project focuses on meeting their needs in relation to the academic offer, social opportunities, transport and career development, among other things.

This document sets out the strategic priorities and objectives for each of the project teams. Over the course of the coming months and years, the teams will identify activities and tasks underpinning these high-level objectives to deliver the vision for Oban as a University Town.





## OBAN IS A UNIVERSITY TOWN!



The Oban University Town project builds on the principle that Oban is already a University Town. The University of the Highlands and Islands has a significant presence in the town with partners Argyll College UHI and Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS UHI).

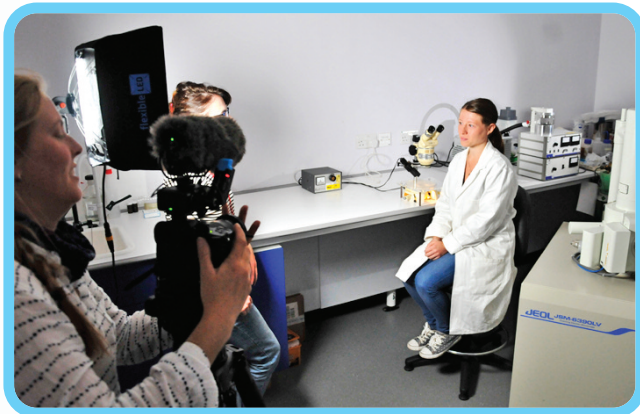
These leading higher education providers recruit local students as well as attracting international students and visitors and in the 2016 / 2017 academic year, almost 800 students were recorded between these three alone. On top of this, there is considerable training locally through institutions such as Lorn and Islands District General Hospital or distance learning through The Open University and others.

Students therefore already comprise almost 10% of Oban's population and this number grows further still when considering those in their final years at Oban High School.

Studentcities.uk suggests that the UK has around 60 University Towns and Cities defined as having 10,000+ students or students comprising more than 5% of the population<sup>1</sup>. Others consider a University Town to be a location where the presence of the educational institution(s) pervades economic and social life<sup>2</sup>. In the case of Oban, the student: resident ratio suggests it is a University Town already, but more than that, the title is also appropriate based on the important role that education currently has as part of the fabric of the town, as well as the crucial role it can play in economic and social development going forward.

## WHY DO WE NEED THIS PROJECT?

Developing Oban as a University Town was identified in the Oban, Lorn and Isles Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP) as a key action to encourage economic development and sustainability. The Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement recognises that the decreasing number of young people of working age is a significant barrier to the economic prosperity of the region and sets out six long term outcomes to support the overall objective that 'Argyll and Bute's economic success is built on a growing population'. Central to this is that 'education, skills and training maximises opportunities for all'<sup>3</sup>.



Oban is home to high quality educational institutions and a growing student population; however, the local economy is predominately service-based and dependant on seasonal tourism. Up to a third of businesses in the area have identified specific recruitment challenges, with some struggling to fill up as many as 71% of roles<sup>4</sup>. While educational attainment in Argyll and Bute is currently around the national average, there remains a challenge to ensure opportunities are created encouraging young people to further their education, develop skills and build careers and businesses in the region. It is crucial that further development meets the needs of the local labour market and that skilled and qualified young people are retained within the local economy<sup>5</sup>.

So, although Oban is already a University Town with significant opportunities available there is still great potential for development, working closely with businesses and communities in the area to ensure the best outcomes possible in relation to both economic and social development in the region.

<sup>1</sup> [www.studentcities.uk](http://www.studentcities.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College\\_town](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_town)

<sup>3</sup> Compelling Argyll and Bute and its Administrative Areas: Strategic Overview Report. August 2015

<sup>4</sup> Compelling Argyll and Bute and its Administrative Areas: Strategic Overview Report. August 2015

<sup>5</sup> Argyll and Bute Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2023

## ENHANCING THE ACADEMIC OFFER

The Academic Offer Team will review the current course options in Oban so that it is clear what is already happening between the various institutions. They will then map the natural growth opportunities for development as well as identifying some longer term aspirational prospects. Throughout the process the team will ensure career pathways are identified where possible based on what local businesses and the local economy needs. The team also has the task of considering the teaching space required to meet training needs, looking ahead to the long-term future and developing the reputation of Oban as a place to live and study.

*The Academic Offer team is committed to delivery of the following objectives by 2023:*

### CURRENT OFFERING

- ➔ Develop a greater understanding of the number of students currently studying in Oban as well as students from Oban who choose to study elsewhere in order to provide a baseline and inform next steps.

### ORGANIC GROWTH / QUICK WINS

- ➔ Each partner will commit to share appropriate growth plans with the team as required to track and manage the development process.

### ASPIRATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ➔ Work collaboratively and take a joined-up approach in responding to, and developing, training and education opportunities for both local and incoming students and be flexible to meet future business needs.
- ➔ Further develop the offer to attract international students.
- ➔ Determine the total number of students to be realised for Oban for a five-year timescale and onwards.

### TEACHING SPACE

- ➔ Review and detail current teaching space and timetable requirements in Oban.
- ➔ Ensure that growth plans are mapped to available teaching space and the need for further infrastructure is appropriately communicated.

### GROWING OUR INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION

There are 58 international students from 28 different nationalities within SAMS alone, as well as annual student visits, student groups from the USA and Europe, as well as other UK institutions. The students, their families and friends are some of the best ambassadors for Oban as a place to visit!





## DELIVERING INFRA- STRUCTURE NEEDS

The core focus of the Infrastructure Team is on the accommodation needs of current students and academic visitors, as well as mapping the future requirements. This will involve looking at what part-time and full-time accommodation is already in place as well as what is needed to allow for growth plans, while ensuring optimal benefit for Oban and residents. The team will also consider access for students in and around the various training facilities in Oban, making sure their needs are met while also considering how this can benefit the local population.

*The Infrastructure Team is committed to delivery of the following objectives by 2023:*

### ACCESSIBILITY

- ➔ Work with providers to ensure that sustainable transport links between teaching, residential and social space are fit for purpose.
- ➔ Encourage the use of active travel by students, potentially including a Green Travel Plan.

### FULL TIME ACCOMMODATION

- ➔ Develop further understanding of demand, anticipating in the region of a further 65 full time beds.
- ➔ Review site availability and opportunities of development of student accommodation.
- ➔ Engage with private sector to provide information and encourage market response to demand.

### PART TIME ACCOMMODATION

- ➔ Evaluate the number of individual bed nights needed by each institution, and when across a year.
- ➔ Review how part time bed requirements tie in or impact on full time requirements.

### EXCELLENCE IN PERFORMING ARTS

Oban has so much to offer from a School of Traditional Music, to recording facilities and live music venues. We also have internationally renowned experiences such as Oban Live generating over £1m of visitor spend in the area. We have a wealth of opportunities to build on and expand performing arts education in Oban.



## MAXIMISING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The Business Needs and Opportunities Team will work to ensure that local businesses are effectively engaged in the University Town process. The team will review the needs of employers and work with other project teams to ensure appropriate training opportunities are mapped to career paths in the region. The team will also consider social space as there is a need to work with local businesses and facilities to review what is currently available and what will be needed to meet future needs including pubs, restaurants, clubs, live performance venues and sports facilities. The approach taken will optimise the benefit of developing Oban as a University Town for both the students and local population alike.

*The Business Needs and Opportunities Team is committed to delivery of the following objectives by 2023:*

### COMMERCIAL ENGAGEMENT

- ➔ Work with the business community to raise awareness of student presence in Oban.
- ➔ Facilitate a service for businesses to advertise employment opportunities to the wider student community.
- ➔ Develop career paths to retain graduates in Oban.
- ➔ Provide employability training for students and awareness raising for businesses.
- ➔ Engage with businesses to scope the potential for involvement with a Marine Industry Training Centre going forward.

### SOCIAL / CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ➔ Work with students to better understand their needs in Oban and create more opportunities for them to engage with the town, e.g. through welcome packs, discounts and student events.
- ➔ Develop visibility and interaction between students, businesses and other service providers in Oban.



### EXCITING MARINE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

There are more than 100 marine related businesses operating within a 20 mile radius of Oban, and many more throughout the region, which have specific skill requirements. There is great potential to expand Oban's marine training offering through the development of new facilities and courses.



## COMMUNICATIONS / ENGAGEMENT

The Communications Team will have an important role in the University Town project, working to let everyone with an interest know what's going on and promoting Oban as a world class place to study. This will include the initial development of a communications plan for the project and then working with all project stakeholders to ensure it is implemented and that an up-to-date and consistent message is promoted both internally and externally. The team will have a crucial role in development of project branding and messaging, social media, project website, mailing lists and events.



*The Communications Team is committed to delivery of the following objectives by 2023:*

### BRANDING

- ➔ Ensure OaUT is represented at appropriate events by partners.
- ➔ Develop and distribute promotional materials for the project.

### ENGAGEMENT

- ➔ Commitment to regular publication and promotion of the project in local media.
- ➔ Development and implementation of a digital strategy to engage with partners and public.
- ➔ Ensure consistency of message for internal communications.





## WHO IS INVOLVED?

This ambitious plan has attracted much support including commitments from Argyll and Bute Council; Argyll College UHI; Bid4Oban; Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE); Oban High School; Scottish Association of Marine Science (SAMS) UHI; Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and University of Highlands & Islands (UHI). Each of these organisations has committed time and resource to the project to-date, however input is welcome from others at any time.

## GET INVOLVED

If you would like to know more about the Oban University Town project or input going forward, we would love to hear from you. Throughout the project we will be keen to hear the views of residents, students, community groups and businesses, as well as other interested parties.

Anyone wanting to find out more, or who would like to add ideas, or highlight opportunities to the project teams can get in touch either through the website [www.obanunitown.org](http://www.obanunitown.org) or via email to [iain@imanidevelopment.com](mailto:iain@imanidevelopment.com) or [lucinda.gray@hient.co.uk](mailto:lucinda.gray@hient.co.uk).

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