

Easdale Island Rush and Gush Survey

Methodology and Key Findings 2013



SUZANNE MCINTOSH PLANNING LIMITED

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Eilean Eisdeal commissioned Suzanne McIntosh Planning Limited to assist the trust in addressing: the ongoing issue of waste facilities on the island; informal storage of waste and materials at the Rush and Gush; the amenity of the harbour area and Argyll and Bute Council Planning Department's enquiry regarding the planning status of the land at the Rush and Gush; as well as the need to consult with its community.
- 1.2 Suzanne McIntosh Planning Limited (SMP) is a Planning, Urban Design and Mediation consultancy based in Edinburgh. It is led by Suzanne McIntosh BA(Hons) MRTPI, a chartered town planner, urban designer and mediator who has 23 years experience in both public and private sector planning. She is regularly engaged by community groups throughout Scotland to act on their behalf.
- 1.3 Eilean Eisdeal required a multi-disciplinary approach, a sensitivity to island matters given the importance of the island in historical, conservation and landscape terms and an independent company to act on their behalf. Eilean Eisdeal recognise and celebrate the special qualities of the island and its setting. However, they also recognise the importance that these elements and the trust plays in the sustainability of the island. There is a distinct need for the island to maintain its population, its ferry and make provision for its fragile economy to be sustainable in the longer term.
- 1.4 Both Suzanne McIntosh and her colleague Karol Swanson have visited the island on several occasions and consulted with Eilean Eisdeal as clients; as well as Historic Scotland and Argyll and Bute Council in order to prepare for the required consultation of those with an interest in the island whose feedback is important to the clients. Eilean Eisdeal was explicit in requiring an open and transparent approach to the consultation thereby giving SMP the free reign to undertake it as they saw fit and report back accordingly.
- 1.5 SMP drafted a survey questionnaire to be circulated to every household on the island, every member of Eilean Eisdeal, the community council, elected Councillors and MSP, Historic Scotland and Argyll and Bute Council Planning Department. Respondents were invited to attend a consultation event which was held on Saturday 13th April 2013 10.30am to 12.30pm in the Island Hall. The nature of the event was an informal drop in session to allow a mediated discussion to take place either in groups, one to one or in pairs. Eilean Eisdeal provided refreshments and some Directors attended in a listening capacity. A number of tables were set up at the event with copies of the questionnaire available, OS base plans of the island to allow productive discussion over a plan and give people the opportunity to mark things that were important to them on the plan. A copy of the extract of the Argyll and Bute local plan was available on each table to remind us of

the planning status of the island at present and for reference use in discussions.

- 1.6 The event was well attended with a constant flow of people coming in, many expressed their appreciation at being able to discuss the issues and other matters with someone independent of the island who had a clear understanding of planning matters and the fact that it was held on a Saturday morning giving reasonable notice and access to all. Many felt they wanted to fill the questionnaire in at the session, others wanted to take it away and complete it in their own time.

2. Key Findings

- 2.1 The consultation enabled residents, visitors and friends of Easdale to essentially have their say on the future of the Rush and Gush. SMP observed that Argyll and Bute Council Planning had been putting Eilean Eisdeal under considerable pressure to submit a planning application for the change of use of the land to the island tip/ storage area. It appeared from what the Council's Planning Enforcement Officer had said that this pressure was coming from a minority of residents on the island who were keen to stop the area being used as informal storage. Eilean Eisdeal did not feel that reacting quickly to the council's request was in the best interests of the island and that a consultation was important to establishing if submitting a planning application was the right thing to do. They were conscious that any tipping at the Rush and Gush wasn't necessarily avoidable given the lack of bulky refuse pick ups to the island. In their opinion Argyll and Bute Council were required to engage with the island further on this matter and be part of the working towards a solution rather than resorting to a reactive planning application to change the use of the land to a storage area/tip which would likely generate significant levels of objection and not resolve the issue as to why the informal tipping was happening in the first place. A more forward thinking, holistic approach was required. Argyll and Bute Council Planning have been kept fully informed of the nature of the survey and consultation event being undertaken and were explicitly invited to attend. This offer was not taken up.
- 2.2 There were 38 respondents in total to the questionnaire and of these, 16 identified themselves as year-round residents of Easdale. The consultation essentially enabled the community to express their views openly and without prejudice. As can be expected in this type of exercise, there were some clashes of opinion but surprisingly, more agreement than dissent. While most people responded just to the questions asked, some people took the time to submit more lengthy, detailed suggestions about the future of the Rush and Gush. One person described the consultation as a "*worthwhile exercise*", while another stated that, "*after attending your drop-in meeting...I was encouraged to see that you were listening and noting what was said by those who attended*". Not everyone answered every question and some

wanted to remain anonymous apart from making the additional points at the end of the survey.

- 2.3 As the main focus of the exercise was the use of the Rush and Gush, this conclusion will sum up responses directly pertaining to this issue. Other, equally important and relevant comments made on other matters have also been recorded and presented to Eilean Eisdeal and could form the basis of further community discussion in the future.

Use of the Rush and Gush

- 2.4 Only two respondents admitted to using the Rush and Gush to dump unwanted items with a further two admitting that they used the Rush and Gush occasionally. Nearly 90% of those surveyed stated that they don't (and never would) use the Rush and Gush to dump unwanted items.
- 2.5 What is apparent from the responses is that the respondents have concerns about the Rush and Gush and many would like to see a more formalised use of the ground for recycling or other purposes. 57% strongly agreed with this and another 29% said they were unsure but would like to explore options. No respondent said they were happy with the current arrangement and 14% said that they strongly disagreed with any formalised use of the Rush and Gush. Some islanders had no clear view on what the Rush and Gush is to be used for.
- 2.6 There were strong views about 'fly-tipping' or the use of this terminology on the site, particularly in relation to refuse associated with building work on the island. Several respondents mentioned that as the building material dumped in the Rush and Gush comes from householders and businesses on the island, these people should take more personal responsibility for removing their own waste. The point was also made that the Rush and Gush is physically one of the few places on the island that is visibly contained from the water.

Views on the Council's current waste provision

- 2.7 There is widespread dissatisfaction with the current waste provision. 45% of respondents branded the provision as inadequate for the needs of the island, while 36% suggested that it needs improvement. 18% said that it is good for some items. No one described the provision as excellent. Clearly there is scope for a conversation with the council to provide an improved service.
- 2.8 Many respondents said that they would welcome organised up-lifts of heavy and bulky items a few times per year.
- 2.9 Despite this, several respondents felt that the Council should not be expected to further fund recycling initiatives on the island. One

respondent stated that they considered the existing subsidy to Easdale Island to be disproportionate to its population.

Amenity of the Rush and Gush

- 2.10 This subject clearly divided the community, with 46% stating that the dump at the Rush and Gush is not noticeable, but 40% described it as a 'constant eyesore' and a further 12% said it was 'noticeable at certain times of the tide.
- 2.11 Several people mentioned that the Rush and Gush is 'tucked away from normal viewing points', which made it an ideal location for a better refuse and recycling facility. It is near enough to use but far enough away to avoid smells.
- 2.12 Foot access to the Rush and Gush, particularly for the elderly and disabled, was cited as a problem.
- 2.13 Formal access to the Rush and Gush by boat or barge would require a new reinforced slipway or pier. This might stop heavy commercial boats from using (and possibly damaging) the old harbour walls.

Need for more formalised use of Rush and Gush for recycling or other purposes

- 2.14 The majority of the community (57%) strongly agreed that this is the case. A further 29% were unsure but would like to explore the options. Only 14% strongly disagreed.
- 2.15 There was a suggestion by many to re-site the bins to the Rush and Gush. This would alleviate some of the problem of odour and flies from bins (particularly in the summer) creating an unpleasant impression for tourists and causing a nuisance to residents.
- 2.16 Some areas of the island look untidy as residents store unused and unwanted items outside their house. This issue could be resolved if they were able to move these items to the Rush and Gush to be recycled. Another point was made a number of times that the houses on the island are small, normal opportunities to extend properties that exist elsewhere do not exist here and so space is of a premium. Often attic spaces on the island are full of items that could be recycled if a suitable space existed on the island.
- 2.17 It would be useful to have simple sheds to attract self-employed people with small businesses to the island. This will need infrastructure to support it but will bring new people and aid regeneration on the island. Perhaps an individual builder who will get use of the land in exchange to maintaining the site.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 From the results of the survey and speaking to many of the islanders and those with an interest in the island it is clear that there needs to be a solution to the issue of recycling provision on the island. It is also clear that the island seeks to have the issue of the unsightly bins at the harbour location more adequately addressed, preferably re-sited at a less impactful location. The Rush and Gush would appear to be such a location. In order to satisfy the request from the Planning Department at the council it would be beneficial to have a clearly defined, formalised use of the Rush and Gush. The island has very few visually contained outside spaces that could adequately accommodate such items as bin storage, recycling points etc and the Rush and Gush is one such a place. Access into the Rush and Gush is a key issue which requires to be discussed with the council at an early stage.
- 3.2 There is a strong desire from the community to work together to formalise any future plans for the Rush and Gush and any other plans for the island. There is also an admiration for the work of Eilean Eisdeal to date. The consultation exercise proved invaluable in moving this dialogue forward and in giving people the opportunity to come together at a time convenient to them to express their views. It was noted that not everyone felt they could do this in an appropriate fashion and it would be useful to understand by what mechanism those who did not attend would feel that they could adequately input in the shaping up of community based projects rather than waiting until the applications are submitted then vociferously objecting. There is a clear desire from all of the attendees at the event that a more open, positive and productive dialogue should be sought and can be achieved in future.
- 3.3 The use of an independent planning mediator to help facilitate a discussion with islanders to focus on bringing forth workable and obtainable plans for the future of the Rush and Gush is required in order to give Eilean Eisdeal the comfort of knowing that the process is undertaken as effectively as possible and give confidence in the value of the results. In the past Eilean Eisdeal has come under criticism from a few for not consulting widely with the island, this is clearly in the past and the trust has moved forward with a much more pro-active engagement mechanism.
- 3.4 Eilean Eisdeal is required now to move forward with discussions with Argyll and Bute Council Waste Services and Planning and also look into what funding opportunities exist through for example the Zero Waste Plan/ Coastal Communities fund at Scottish Government level or what European funding is available to remote communities to assist in community waste planning and sustainability. A more comprehensive approach to a planning proposal that combines the need for formalised recycling provision, a designated area for storage of building materials

and bulky goods awaiting uplift is desirable and fits with the majority of views expressed in the survey.

- 3.5 There is a clear need for a more developed and sustainable means of recycling and waste management on the island with clear instructions for residents and visitors on how to dispose of their waste. A community sustainability plan examining many of the issues explored in the survey and expressing the future needs and requirements of island residents and businesses would be a positive next step.

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