

# Re-establishing Ayrshire as a Functional Economic Geography to benefit its communities

**As part of Analysis in Government Month, Euan Baird shares how the Regional Development Team gained recognition in the 'Impact on policy' category at the Geography in Government Awards.**

Toward the end of what proved to be one of the most unexpected and challenging years for all of us, myself and colleagues in the Scottish Government's Regional Economic Development Division were delighted to be recognised for our work on 'Re-establishing Ayrshire as a Functional Economic Geography to benefit its communities' at the Geography in Government Awards. Winning the 'Impact on Policy' category was a real boost to all involved, underlining that we were on the right path.

Ayrshire is famous for a number of things and people: Ailsa Craig – the granite monolith supplying curling stones to the world; world class golf courses hosting the Open Championship numerous times – the very first championship hosted at Prestwick Golf Club in 1860; Robert Burns, Bill Shankley, Nicola Beneditti all are recognised and respected in their fields. Burns especially has a whole industry which revolves around him and his works and can arguably lay claim to being the most famous Scot ever.

With all that seemingly going for it, what was the problem we were trying to solve in Ayrshire? Well the short answer is down to the administrative geography of Ayrshire, which has not served creation of common purpose. This has had a detrimental impact on the productivity of the whole region in recent decades, hampering efforts to respond to the deindustrialisation that has resulted in Ayrshire being one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK with multiple communities across all three local authorities sharing similar socio-economic challenges.

We have worked hard with partners in Ayrshire to drive progress. No-one in the team would claim that we have finished the job, however we have created a platform from which success can and will be achieved. Amongst activities completed we:

- empowered Ayrshire regional partners and communities to make decisions on the investments that would best serve the needs of Ayrshire
- worked with Ayrshire to develop a regional growth deal for Ayrshire with over £200 million of funding committed by the Scottish and UK Governments that supports a wide range of local economic priorities
- encouraged Ayrshire to take the opportunity to act as a pilot area in Scotland for expansion of the Community Wealth Building model, aiming to retain the greater proportion of spending from anchor institutions within Ayrshire.
- supported Ayrshire to establish a Regional Economic Partnership allowing

Ayrshire to take a more collaborative and strategic view of economic development

Watch the video about the project [Re-establishing Ayrshire as a Functional Economic Geography](#)

Such work really showed up well in the last year where Ayrshire as a region, as a result of the empowerment and encouragement from the Scottish Government, responded to the economic nature of the pandemic in resolute style. Inspiration from the economic themes of the Growth Deal will form the basis of the recovery in Ayrshire, allowing Ayrshire to be in a place to achieve ambitions.

The Community Wealth building project that frames the whole of the Growth Deal is about to go into delivery and will be an inspiration for Community Wealth Building across Scotland. This project feels even more vital as we look to recover from the pandemic and ensure that local communities can thrive in a post-pandemic world.

Winning the award and being recognised by peers across the geography profession certainly felt more welcome last year than any previous recognition received for work, probably because of the pandemic and the adjustments we all had to make.

Of course, I didn't join the civil service to win awards and it certainly isn't why myself and colleagues do the work we do, but winning this did help to revive spirits and re-invigorate the team for what looks like a slightly brighter, but no less challenging 2021 and beyond. The focus will be to ensure that the work in Ayrshire continues and no feeling of 'job done' slips in. We will strive to ensure that Ayrshire can go from strength to strength and be recognised globally for more than golf and Burns.

**By Euan Baird – Regional Economic Development, Scottish Government**