

## Arran Civic Trust 'ACT' Talk "Rural House Design, Affordability and Sustainability"

On Monday Sept 19 Neil Sutherland, an award winning architect from Inverness gave an informative and inspiring talk on rural house design, the speciality of his company. In his presentation he showed several examples of houses he had designed and built mainly of wood, a material, abundant in rural Scotland, in the use of which Neil is expert.

Of particular interest was the speaker's philosophy of house building, that houses should be a pleasure to live in, capable of adaption and extension, be constructed of locally sourced materials, be frugal in the consumption of power and appropriately sited within their surroundings. He stressed the life-enhancing effect of good quality materials and their ultimate economy. He saw volume builders as disregarding these while they enjoy ready planning approval for the mundane and mediocre in contrast to the difficulties faced by innovative and principled designs. The speaker cited Scotland as having the lowest percentage of self-build in Europe as a result of planning rules not designed to facilitate this, the high cost of land and the pernicious practice of land-banking.

In helping the audience to come to terms with the "shock of the new" in house design he pointed out that the style commonly described as the vernacular is inherited from enlightenment new towns initiated by aristocratic estate owners in the eighteenth century. The implication was that they need not represent an inviolable standard by which new designs should be judged.

The presentation was followed by questions and expressions of approval and thanks for what had been fascinating and educative talk.