SURF
Scotland's Regeneration Forum

SURF : sharing experience : shaping practice

SURF 2021 MANIFESTO PROCESS: LAND, PLACE & PLANNING

ABOUT THIS PAPER

SURF is **consulting** with its **members** and **wider contacts** to inform the preparation of its **2021 Manifesto for Community Regeneration**. The 2021 Manifesto will set out what SURF's network thinks the **Scottish Government** could be **doing differently** to better support the regeneration of socially and economically challenged places over the next term of the Scottish Parliament.

SURF's consultation process is structured on **eight key themes**. This briefing paper concerns one of these themes: **land, place and planning**. This covers an interlinked set of fields including land use and ownership, area-based initiatives, the spatial planning system, and community empowerment.

Briefing papers are circulated to SURF consultees who have relevant knowledge, responsibility and experience, with a view to sharing **helpful background information** on the process and theme in advance of consultations. Please click the following links to **learn more** about: What is SURF? How will the 2021 Manifesto be developed?

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

During the coronavirus crisis, **SURF policy and research staff** will be consulting via telephone calls, video interviews, and by requesting email submissions. **SURF is grateful to all participants for giving their time and insights to this process.**

The **following questions** will be used to structure interviews and submissions. They are **optional** and participants may answer as many or as few as they wish. **General comments and views** relevant to the theme are also very welcome.

1. Do you have any views on the growing emphasis on 'place' in national policy, and whether this is supporting positive change in our most disadvantaged communities?
2. As per the most recent Scottish Programme for Government, would you like to see more '20 minute neighbourhoods' emerge in Scotland?
   If so, what changes should policy-makers make to bring this about?
3. Recent policy developments are encouraging more community groups to consider taking on ownership of land and buildings. Are you in favour of this policy direction?
4. In places you are familiar with, such as where you live and/or work, do you think the volume of vacant and derelict land is a significant problem?
   If so, what type of uses would you like to see emerge in these sites?
5. Do you have any views on recent and ongoing changes to the planning system in Scotland, and whether they are likely to be effective in addressing any problems you are aware of?
6. What changes, if any, would you like to see around relationships between local authorities and community anchor organisations on the back of the Local Governance Review?

7. In places you are familiar with, do you think local community groups are engaging effectively with place-based regeneration plans and activities? If not, what barriers are preventing more effective engagement?
8. Do you think people who work as regeneration practitioners, from any sector, are receiving enough support to undertake their roles effectively? If not, what additional support would you like to see made available?
9. Do you have any views on the Scottish Government's additional support for local place-based activity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. What special measures, if any, do you think the Scottish Government should be putting in place to ease the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for deprived places?
11. Do you have any other views on suggestions on what the Scottish Government could be doing differently in the future to better support place-based regeneration in Scotland?

MANIFESTO FOCUS

Some **general information** for participants:

- SURF intends to **record interviews**, for internal use only in supporting the taking of summary notes. Permission to record will be requested at the start of each interview and recording will only take place where active consent is given.
- All individual responses will be **anonymised** in the Manifesto. With permission, SURF intends to publish a list of consultees in the final presentation, noting that inclusion of an individual or organisation does not necessarily imply their agreement with the presented policy recommendations.
- SURF's 2021 Manifesto is **targeted at the Scottish Government** that will be formed after the 2021 Scottish elections. Policy recommendations must be **practical** for the Scottish Government to progress or deliver within its powers and resources over the 2021-2026 Parliamentary term;
- SURF's overall objective is to **improve the lives and opportunities of people living in Scotland's socially and economically challenged places**.
- The consultation process will run while the **COVID-19 pandemic** is ongoing. The long-term implications for Scotland's economy and society are likely to be significant. SURF would like to learn more about views on these implications.

POLICY CONTEXT

Place-Based Approaches

The concept of 'place' has become an increasing focus of public policy in Scotland. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) announced a commitment to the Place Principle in 2018.[i]

The Place Principle, developed with input from SURF and other national bodies, encourages all spheres of local and national government to put place at the centre of decision-making. It advocates enhanced levels of collaboration across sectors based on shared aims and resources, and encourages partners to work closely with communities to identify and act on local priorities.

This growing emphasis on enhanced collaboration at the level of individual neighbourhoods, towns and villages can be contrasted with alternative approaches that focus on regeneration decision-making in a broader regional context. The community-oriented Place Principle envisions a stronger and more collaborative role for community anchor organisations, local businesses and social enterprises, and other entities that are rooted in smaller geographic spheres, in local regeneration plans.[ii]

In the recently published 2020/21 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government made a commitment to work with local authorities to develop '20 minute neighbourhoods'. Popularised in Oregon, Australia and Scandinavia, 20 minute neighbourhoods are places in which residents can meet almost all of their essential needs including employment, education, health care, shopping and leisure within comfortable walking distance from their home. The approach is designed to create benefits for local economies, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, pride of place, and climate change.[iii] [iv]

The Programme for Government also demonstrated the Scottish Government's growing interest in community wealth building. That alternative approach to economic development explicitly seeks to increase wealth retention in local economies through dedicated initiatives and interventions. The three local authorities of Ayrshire are managing a £3m community wealth building fund as part of a pilot project supported by Scotland's Centre for Regional Inclusive Growth.[v]

Local Governance

The Scottish Government and COSLA launched a Review of Local Governance in December 2017. The purpose of the review is to examine how decisions over local services are made, how local governance functions, and what scope exists towards devolving more power to local communities.[vi] As with the rest of the UK, Scotland has one of the most centralised systems of local governance in Europe. Many stakeholders view further devolution as essential to enabling effective local place-based decision-making, and for building on existing community empowerment legislation.[vii]

The first phase of the review focused on communities, with 'Democracy Matters' branded events taking place across the country over 2017-18. The outcomes illustrated a clear appetite amongst members of the public and representatives of community groups for further devolution of power, but there was a lack of clarity over the form this should take.[viii]

Phase two of the review commenced in 2019 by seeking views from local authorities and other public bodies. Among the main messages emerging from the second phase is the contention that local control is limited by the proportion of local authority spending that is presently ring-fenced by national policy decisions.[ix]

The Scottish Government and CoSLA intend to continue the review by considering potential change in the spheres of community empowerment, public sector collaboration, and local budget-setting processes. Local authorities and other public bodies have been invited to make proposals for projects demonstrating enhanced empowerment at the local level. In early 2020, this work, and further consultation, was put on hold as a result of the pandemic.[vi]

Land Reform

The first Land Reform (Scotland) Act was passed in 2003, giving rural and island communities the right to register interest in, and purchase, land.[x] The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 expanded rights into urban communities. The second Land Reform (Scotland) Act, passed in 2016, led to the creation of the Scottish Land Commission, and made it easier for many local groups to progress aspirations for community owned land and buildings.[xi]

The ambition to transfer a greater share of Scotland's land into community ownership has been a significant driver of community led regeneration activity, particularly in rural and island communities where historic patterns of concentrated land ownership have acted as a barrier to community development and regeneration.[xii] There has been a general shift away from policy-makers viewing land ownership and use as a private concern; it is increasingly seen as a vital and

finite public resource with under-played potential in the realms of inclusive growth, community empowerment, health and wellbeing, and the climate emergency.[xiii]

There are related efforts to encourage the growth of community land ownership in urban areas, particularly around vacant and derelict land. One relevant initiative is the Scottish Land Commission's and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency's Vacant and Derelict Land Task Force, which SURF is a member of. The Task Force presented a range of policy recommendations to the Scottish Government in Autumn 2020.[xiv] More generally, the Scottish Land Commission and Scottish Government are keen to see the community ownership of land become a "normalised option" in practice.[xiii]

Spatial Planning

The Planning (Scotland) Act, which was passed in 2019, made a number of significant changes to the planning system in Scotland, with the broad objective of streamlining the process by which development is planned and regulated. The act aims to 'frontload' the planning process, enabling more transparent and quicker development through more effective early consultation with stakeholders.[xv]

The act is designed to offer more certainty for housing development in particular, and gives community bodies the right to draft Local Place Plans, which must be taken into consideration by planning authorities when they form Local Development Plans. The act also allows local authorities to implement an infrastructure levy, although it does not clarify how this will work in practice.[xvi]

The next National Planning Framework (NPF4) is currently under consultation. NPF4 will set out a long-term spatial plan for Scotland that will guide development and infrastructure decision-making priorities and designate projects of national significance. NPF4 has five priority areas of action: climate change, health & wellbeing, inclusive growth, place, and infrastructure. NPF4 will also incorporate the Scottish Planning Policy strategy, which will shape Local Development Plans and influence development control at the planning authority level. [xvii]

Community Anchors

The Scottish Government's current regeneration strategy, *Achieving a Sustainable Future*, defines community led regeneration as:

> *"...local people identifying for themselves the issues and opportunities in their areas, deciding what to do about them, and being responsible for delivering the economic, social and environmental action that will make a difference".* [xviii]

This covers a wide range of activity at different scales, from informal, volunteer-run community activity to established community anchor organisations such as housing associations, development trusts and other types of charities and social enterprises that employ staff, manage assets and provide services.

Encouraging more of this community-led activity has been continually and prominently highlighted as a central aim of Scottish Government regeneration policy since the 2011 publication of *Achieving a Sustainable Future*. This has been backed up in a range of legislation and strategy, including the Fairer Scotland Action Plan of 2016, and the aforementioned Community Empowerment, Land Reform and Planning Acts. Community anchor organisations have increased opportunities to lead regeneration activity, acquire assets, manage local services, operate community enterprises, develop Local Place Plans, influence public services, and collaborate with other stakeholders in formal regeneration processes. [xix] [xx]

SURF network discussions have raised important questions about: what this shift means for the existing role of local authorities; whether the enhanced role for community anchors is adequately supported through sustainable funding mechanisms; the potential for disconnection between community anchors and the views of the local communities they operate within; the complexities that develop when two or more anchors compete for influence and resources in the same place; and the tendency towards box-ticking tokenism that anchors regularly cite in public sector engagement processes.

Place-Based Practitioners

Limited attention is paid to the role of individual practitioners in place-based regeneration. SURF participated in a 2018-20 EU funded research project that explored the practical realities for regeneration practitioners that work in disadvantaged areas of Amsterdam, Birmingham, Copenhagen and Glasgow. This 'Smart Urban Intermediaries' project was undertaken by a consortium including the Universities of Edinburgh and Birmingham. The project team interviewed and shadowed practitioners, explored learning outcomes in a series of international conferences and study visits, and promoted findings in several publications.

They reported that the role is a highly demanding one, which requires: a passion for the area; a deep knowledge of local assets, challenges and opportunities; the ability to build and maintain credibility with the local community; a persistence in accomplishing goals; an understanding of the wide range of disciplines connected to regeneration; and the skills to engage effectively across multiple sectors to bring people and resources together in pursuit of positive change.[xxi]

The project highlighted a number of underplayed challenges, including the risk of burnout, the financial insecurity common to many roles, and the 'curse of success' that can arise when local regeneration demands increase on the back of visible progress, but resources are constrained. A project report on the Scottish policy implications highlighted the scope for improved recognition and resourcing of the place-based practitioner role, such as by establishing local practitioner networks, providing dedicated training support, and piloting the long-term core funding of precarious roles.[xxii]

COVID-19

The pandemic has created far-reaching impacts on Scottish communities and the organisations that support them. The impacts have been disproportionately felt in the poorest places.[xxiii]

A range of short-term support programmes have been made available to regeneration agencies, community groups and other actors by funders including the Scottish Government during the pandemic. Meanwhile, long-term national policy responses are being informed by a number of experts' groups including the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, the Social Renewal Advisory Board, the Town Centre Action Plan Review Group, and the Place Principle Group.

Following the Spring 2020 establishment of COVID-19 public health measures, SURF asked its extensive network of organisations that deliver frontline services, and their partner agencies, to tell us about their experience of the local responses to the pandemic. An analysis of more than 150 responses was published in a report entitled 'Lessons from the Frontline', which identifies ten common themes including digital exclusion, a relaxation of conventional funding restrictions, and extraordinary collaborative efforts to address food insecurity.[xxiii]

A follow-up report, 'Building Community Resilience', examines selected learning outcomes in greater depth and reflects on what is required to sustain enhanced local place collaborations beyond the immediate crisis period.[xxiv]

SURF CONTACT

SURF's Research & Administrative Assistant, Christopher Murray, is coordinating the consultation responses.

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Interviews will be carried out by Christopher and by SURF's Policy & Participation Manager, Derek Rankine.

For further information on SURF, please visit: www.surf.scot

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