



# An 'Alliance for Action' for Langholm

A SURF Feasibility Study Report | May 2018

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

This paper was produced by SURF – Scotland's Regeneration Forum. It summarises the process and the main findings of a 2017/18 feasibility study, into the potential for practically and productively introducing SURF's 'Alliance for Action' regeneration approach in Langholm.

## **ABOUT SURF'S 'ALLIANCE FOR ACTION'**

Since 2013, SURF has been operating a cross-sector, collaborative 'Alliance for Action' programme in a small set of communities across Scotland. The aim is to promote the most productive relationship between local circumstances, knowledge & assets and national regeneration agencies, policies & resources.

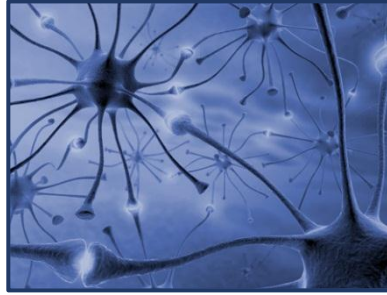
The programme's dual purpose is:

- to improve regeneration outcomes in participating communities;
- to enhance wider policy and resource considerations for supporting community regeneration in the current economic context.

The programme currently operates in four places: Dunoon (Argyll), East Kirkcaldy (Fife), Govan (Glasgow), and Rothesay (Isle of Bute). Feasibility studies for new potential sites in Dumfries & Galloway and Dundee are ongoing.

Further information, including project background, site progress reports and thematic briefing papers, is available on the SURF website: [www.surf.scot/alliance-for-action](http://www.surf.scot/alliance-for-action)

The 'Alliance for Action' programme is delivered by SURF and supported by the Scottish Government and the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland. Valuable additional support is provided by relevant local authorities and national agency partners.



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*Supporters of SURF's 'Alliance for Action' programme for 2018-19*

# 1 Executive Summary: Langholm Feasibility Study

## 1.1 Local Engagement

This summary is based on extended and diverse interactions with a range of relevant groups and individuals. These conversations include direct engagement with:

- Dumfries and Galloway Council's Economic Development Team;
- Meetings with:
  - Relevant elected representatives and officers from Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries;
  - Leading community group representatives and project officers;
  - Local business leaders;
  - Representatives of housing, social care and other charitable organisations;
- A well-attended public event, the open promotion of which included an advert in the local newspaper and locally displayed posters;
- Additional local residents and groups via emails and free post comment postcards.

The above list is not comprehensive. SURF is grateful for the support and guidance received from the Dumfries and Galloway Council Ward Manager and other colleagues in the initial identification of, and opportunities to consult with, relevant local stakeholders.

## 1.2 Emergent Themes

These discussions, and the broader feasibility study process, identified seven broad potential development themes:

1. Langholm's economic purpose;
2. The town's tourist offer;
3. Its political geography;
4. Land use, access and ownership;
5. Community empowerment;
6. Housing and infrastructure;
7. Transport.

Section three elaborates on the regeneration-related challenges and opportunities highlighted to SURF under each of these themes.

## 1.3 Outcomes, Recommendation and Proposed Process for Action.

Local stakeholders across the community, public, private, academic and charity sectors, have indicated that they would welcome the additional collaborative focus on the town's physical, social and economic development that the 'Alliance for Action' programme may be able to provide.

Local 'buy-in' to the 'Alliance for Action' approach has been a fundamental element of successful introduction and delivery in the other existing sites of operation. SURF welcomes the indication of broad local enthusiasm and the specific offers of participation and support that have been received in the course of the feasibility study.

From SURF's perspective, learning from engaging in the context and circumstances of Langholm, would add value in and across its wider programme of activities in support of improved regeneration policy and practice. SURF is reasonably confident that its approach could assist local efforts to jointly address some priority challenges by building on relevant assets and related opportunities.

**SURF therefore recommends that Langholm becomes the fifth 'Alliance for Action' place of focus for its cross sector collaborative efforts.** If that recommendation is agreed locally, SURF would go on to liaise with key stakeholders towards a programme of practical activities based

on agreed priorities. These would then form the remit for a SURF employed part-time local facilitator, based in the town. Her/his initial role would be to support the successful development and delivery of locally identified priority projects, for an initial period of two years from Autumn 2018.

SURF would be responsible for the employment of the facilitator. Through its own capacity and networks it would provide her/him with supportive supervision, information, advice. That would include the facilitation of appropriate connections to relevant local, regional and national people, processes, policies and resources in support of the locally agreed aims and priorities. SURF would seek appropriate participation, support and information from relevant key local stakeholders.

While SURF's Alliance model is designed to remain flexible and responsive, the respective roles, responsibilities and inputs of SURF and key local stakeholders, would be agreed and set out in a formal Memorandum of Understanding. It would be adapted, as and when necessary by agreement, thorough the evolution of the Langholm Alliance for Action initiative.

Within the above process, SURF would strive to constructively link the practical challenges, opportunities and learning from the Langholm Alliance for Action with relevant wider resources, policies and initiatives. At the time of writing, these would include the South of Scotland Skills and Development Agency, the Scottish Government's Inclusive Growth agenda, its Community Empowerment and Asset Transfer policies and the Local Governance Review.

## 2 The Study: Objectives and Programme

### 2.1 Context

SURF's 'Alliance for Action' is a collaborative activity and shared learning programme that SURF is presently coordinating in the four case study areas of Dunoon (Argyll), East Kirkcaldy (Fife), Govan (Glasgow), and Rothesay (Isle of Bute).

In these communities, which have differing contexts but similar challenges, SURF is working with relevant local and national partners to:

- Build local capacity, strengthen resilience, increase practical outcomes and improve the wellbeing of local residents;
- Link local knowledge, initiatives and assets with national networks, policies and resources in support of holistic and better coordinated regeneration activity;
- Draw out transferable learning towards more successful and sustainable policy and practice in community regeneration in Scotland.

SURF's 'Alliance for Action' programme is being delivered over 2018-19 with support from the Scottish Government and the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland.

SURF's collaborative approach is based on exploring the connections between community challenges and assets, identifying collective priorities, and facilitating enhanced connections to wider policy and resources. The main aim is to enhance shared outcomes for all involved, in contrast to more conventionally narrow and shorter-term solutions.

The 'Alliance for Action' model is based on SURF's understanding that:

- Regeneration is a long-term challenge, which requires long-term rather than short-term commitment;
- Marginal or disconnected places and communities require additional support in challenging times;
- Public sector assets, action and resources are essential elements in supporting and sustaining community regeneration;
- With adequate support, community groups and enterprises can be catalysts towards more effective and sustainable local regeneration;

- More inclusive and practical partnership working is required to:
  - make better use of public sector powers and assets to maximise regeneration opportunities;
  - minimise the degenerative impact of public sector revenue and capital programme reductions;
  - enhance and broaden the collective benefits of what are often otherwise narrow 'silo' based investments.

## 2.2 Rationale for introducing an 'Alliance for Action' initiative in Langholm

To maximise productive value from its 'Alliance for Action' programme, SURF seeks to ensure that there is a balanced portfolio of places in the programme. That helps it to produce and share transferable lessons with relevant partners, settings and activities across the rest of Scotland.

SURF's programme currently includes a range of sites across urban/rural, mainland/coastal/island, and small town/large town/dense city neighbourhood contexts. They share similar broad challenges of dislocation and degeneration but have distinctive responses and priorities based on locally relevant approaches, assets and aspirations.

In discussions with the Scottish Government in early 2017, aimed at building on SURF's already successful 'Alliance for Action' model, it was agreed that the scope of the programme would benefit from the introduction of a semi-rural site in the south of Scotland. The proposal was to engage with regeneration partners' efforts in a geographical context which, as SURF's [2016 Manifesto for Community Regeneration](#) highlighted, has not benefited from national regeneration policy and investment coordination, to the same degree as city regions and the Highlands & Islands.

Following initial informal consultations with Dumfries & Galloway Council, the Crichton Institute, Third Sector Dumfries & Galloway and other local partners, SURF accepted a proposal that the town of Langholm, in the east of the region, presented a reasonable option for a potential new 'Alliance for Action' site of collaboration.

After confirmation of adequate support from the Scottish Government and Dumfries and Galloway Council for taking on that additional work, SURF began a six-month feasibility study exercise from Autumn 2017 to Spring 2018. The aim being to assess the wisdom and practicality of applying the 'Alliance for Action' model in Langholm.

SURF's five stage feasibility study process is described in the following section.

## 2.3 Feasibility Study Approach

### *Stage 1 – Project Scoping*

- Work planning
- Information gathering
- Initial engagement, featuring:
  - Meetings with Dumfries and Galloway Council's Communities Department and Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway to accrue information on local stakeholders and influencers.
  - Meetings with The Eskdale Foundation, Xcel Project, Langholm First, Langholm, Ewes and Westerkirk Community Council, The Langholm Initiative, and other local community groups to determine interest in, and appetite for, potential project participation.
  - Meetings with relevant Dumfries and Galloway Council Elected Members.
  - Meetings with the local Health and Social Care Partnership, the University of Glasgow's Crichton Campus, and The Stove Network to provide additional regional context.

- An initial stakeholder level workshop to identify the various opportunities for developing an 'Alliance for Action' approach in Langholm, supported by an open public invitation promoted through an advert in the local newspaper, locally displayed posters, and online activity.

### ***Stage 2: Research***

- Further exploring the local context, including through the:
  - Production of a statistical profile of Langholm & Eskdale with details on demographics, deprivation indicators, amenities, assets and regeneration-related activities.
  - Review of relevant reports identified by SURF, Dumfries & Galloway Council, the Crichton Institute, and other partners;
  - Review of mainstream budgets affecting Langholm & Eskdale;
  - Review of extant and proposed project bids.

### ***Stage 3: Developing Alliance Options***

- Analysing options for an 'Alliance for Action' approach. Specifically, engaging further with local stakeholders to investigate viability and opportunities, with a view to identifying:
  - Interest in the 'Alliance for Action' model;
  - Local issues and priorities;
  - Methods for responding to these issues and priorities;
  - Potential development barriers.

### ***Stage 4: Report and Recommendations***

- Testing 'Alliance for Action' development options with potential participants, including:
  - Clarifying deliverability options;
  - Presentation of draft report to stakeholders in a second Langholm public workshop to discuss findings;
  - Evaluating key partners' views and responses.

### ***Stage 5: Completion***

- Ensuring that the 'Alliance for Action' proposals are embedded in wider processes.
- Achieving consensus from key stakeholders on the implementation plan and strategic goals.
- Providing key recommendations on integrating the 'Alliance for Action' plans with existing Dumfries & Galloway Council strategies, including the Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement.

## **2.4 Feasibility Study Support**

Following SURF's initial discussions with senior management at Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Council's support for the feasibility study was established. At that stage, the Council identified two officials to assist with the process, Stuart Hamilton (Ward Manager, Annandale East and Eskdale) and Rhona Macgregor (Community Learning & Development Worker).

Through these colleagues, SURF was able to arrange meetings with leading representatives of community groups, businesses and other public agencies with responsibilities for Langholm. SURF is grateful to these individuals for their support.

The process has involved face to face interviews with more than 25 individuals. In addition to this, SURF held a public meeting in November 2017, which was advertised through the local paper, the Eskdale and Liddesdale Advertiser, in addition to posters and online activity. This was attended by around 30 people, most of whom were not engaged in the programme of interviews. The event was notable for the quality of the discussion and range of views represented, which are summarised in [a dedicated report](#).

A number of local perspectives were also provided to SURF via comment postcards, which were made available in key town locations, by email, and by social media communications (SURF is active on Twitter and Facebook).

All of these engagements with have been highly useful to the feasibility study process, and have provided a snapshot of the views of individuals in the community from a wide spread of backgrounds and interests, complementing the existing knowledge base and additional research conducted by SURF.

SURF would like to record its sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the Langholm feasibility study, by any method.

## 2.5 Central Questions

SURF used the following questions as a basis for its Langholm feasibility study enquiries:

- What is the best way to collectively improve the social, economic and physical environment in Langholm?
- Can Langholm mobilise local knowledge, skills and enthusiasm into a coherent approach to regeneration?
- Can the special character and heritage of Langholm be protected in a manner consistent with efforts to modernise its economic functioning and deliver sustainable economic growth?
- Can the Langholm community, the private sector and the public sector, acting as local partners, establish and cooperate on a shared vision for the town?
- Which approach to delivery suits Langholm best – and how does the town ensure that its chosen approach can be sustained over time?
- Can the 'Alliance for Action' approach enhance the regeneration of Langholm?



*Comment postcards and a public event complemented information gathering via stakeholder interviews*

## 3 Langholm: Conditions and Prospects.

Part of this feasibility study has focussed on research into Langholm, this has included the preparation of a statistical profile of the town and a review of policies and other documentation relating to its past, present and future. This has informed SURFs wider engagement with stakeholders in the town.

### 3.1 Area Profile

Langholm has a relatively small residential population, in comparison to most neighbouring towns (Moffat, Annan, Gretna and Lockerbie), of 2,227 individuals. In terms of deprivation, as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), last updated in 2016, Langholm compares relatively well to Dumfries and Galloway as a whole. 9% of residents are recorded as income deprived compared to an average across Dumfries of 11%, and employment deprivation is slightly lower at 8%, compared to a regional average of 10%.

Langholm also scores relatively favourably in terms of education. Less than 5% of young people are not in education, employment or training, and 10% progress to full time higher education, which is 2% more than the average for Dumfries and Galloway. The area is among the least health-deprived and housing-deprived in the country, with particularly low rates of substance abuse and overcrowding.

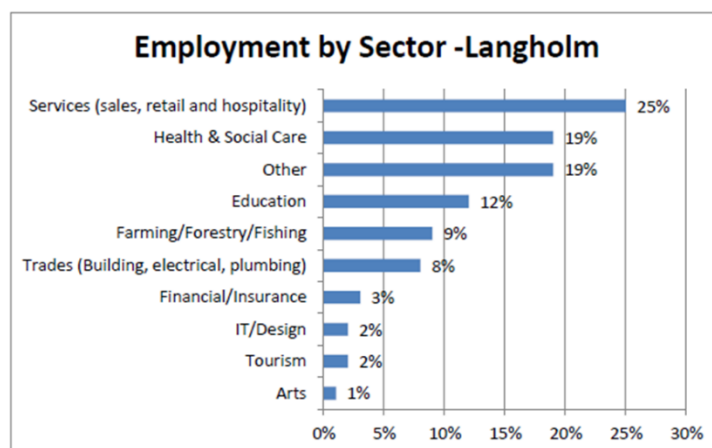
Langholm, in common with communities across the region, faces a significant demographic shift. According to national trends, Dumfries and Galloway will see a decline in the working age population and an increase in the number of over 65s. The former is set to decline by 14% while the latter is due to increase by 46%. The number of over 85s in the region is in line to increase even faster, doubling within the next 20 years. Given that Langholm is already demographically imbalanced towards older people, these trends will clearly have an impact on the community's future development; this is particularly significant with regard to housing and the provision of health and social care; Langholm<sup>i</sup>.

### 3.2 The Local Economy

The local economy in Langholm has undergone significant changes in the recent past. The continued and steady decline of manufacturing over the past 20 years has been the principle economic challenge facing the town, with the last major textile mill closing in 2013. The town's last remaining care home, Dallaran, also closed in 2013 with the loss of 24 jobs.<sup>ii</sup> Naturally, these job losses have had a knock-on effect on other local businesses and services. There is also speculation that one of the town's current major employers, Edinburgh Woollen Mill, which employs around 300 people, may be relocating its office to Carlisle in 2018.<sup>iii</sup> This would leave the town, in common with Dumfries and Galloway as a whole, heavily reliant on smaller businesses for employment.<sup>iv</sup>

Hospitality, health and education are among the main sources of employment in Langholm, with agriculture and retail also significant. A 2015 study showed the spread of employment as follows:





Source: CADISPA Study 2013

While the diversification of the rural economy has been a long term policy goal for the Scottish Government, the extent to which small businesses can be relied on to grow and sustain Langholm's economy is less clear, given the general tendency for rural businesses to be 'low growth'.<sup>v</sup>

Fuller information on Langholm's demographic and economic profile is available in a SURF policy review which is an appendix to this report.

## 4 Key Local Issues

This feasibility study has involved face-to-face interviews with over 25 individuals; among them representatives from local community organisations (including; the Community Council, the Day Centre, the Eskdale Foundation, the Xcel Project, Langholm First and the Langholm Initiative), local land owners and investors, the Health and Social Care Partnership, local artists, and Dumfries and Galloway Council. A community event was also held in November 2017 at the Buccleuch Centre. This was attended by around 30 individuals, including representatives from a wide range of organisations, and a number of Langholm residents not attached to any particular group or business.

From the content of these discussions, and additional written submissions supplied to SURF, we have identified seven key areas of concern to Langholm stakeholders. In broad terms, there was a general consensus that these seven areas were the most pressing areas of development.

A short summary of these seven themes follows. Please note that the various views and opinions recorded in this section are not all mutually consistent and do not necessarily reflect the views of a particular local organisation.

### 4.1(a) Economic Purpose

There were widespread and deep concerns amongst almost all those consulted regarding the economic future of the town. This was in the context of the long term decline in manufacturing and textiles, along with more recent concerns regarding health and social care facilities closures, the retirement of long-standing business owners, and the future of the Edinburgh Woollen Mill headquarters in the town.

A number of views were expressed regarding possible 'futures' for Langholm. Some believed that the 'good jobs' lost with the decline of manufacturing needed to be replaced by encouraging established businesses and start-ups to move into Langholm premises. Others argued that the town needed to

accept the loss of industry and embrace its position as a 'nice place to live', with residents commuting for work to places within travelling distance that have a ready supply of jobs such as Carlisle.

Concerns were raised that economic decline and depopulation would continue as long as the town failed to provide young people with good reasons to stay in Langholm.

A number of those consulted were, however, optimistic regarding the possibilities for growth of small scale businesses in arts, crafts and manufacturing in the town. The formation of a Langholm Creative Network was highlighted as an attempt to drive this. The positive economic possibilities of renewable energy production, commercial forests, and new housing & social care facilities in the area were also raised by a number of parties.

#### **4.1(b) Tourist Offer**

There was a general view that the tourism offer in Langholm is presently underplayed. A number of potential development opportunities were suggested to SURF. These included:

- A Genealogy Service: there has been a recent growth in visitors from England, the USA, Australia and elsewhere, who have come to the town to find out more about their surnames and family history. Langholm could build on this by providing an expert to help people explore their roots through local archives and signposting to relevant places.
- An Active Travel Hub: Muckletoon Adventure Festival has provided a good deal of value in developing and promoting local hiking, mountain biking, woodland walking and trail running opportunities. This is ripe for further development.
- Theatre Town: Langholm could follow the successful model adopted by Pitlochry and the 'theme town' approach promoted by Dumfries and Galloway Council, by using its Buccleuch Centre theatre programme to attract tourists to the town from further afield.
- A Borders Reivers Centre: the town would offer the perfect base for this, straddling the Borders and Cumbria heritage trails, and offering convenient access to international visitors via Glasgow, Edinburgh and Newcastle airports.
- A Thomas Telford Museum: a centre dedicated to the celebrated 19th century engineer could be housed in one of the town's vacant historic buildings.
- Crowdfunding ventures – which seek small donations from local people and ex-pats to support community projects – could be explored as a way of initiating new tourist-friendly community led developments.

A number of interviewees expressed disappointment in the existing tourism profile Langholm has in VisitScotland and Dumfries & Galloway Council marketing communications. Some local people, however, accepted that more could be done by groups in Langholm to tell these agencies about what is available to see and do locally.

#### **4.1(c) Geographic Boundaries**

SURF heard a number of local stakeholders express the view that the regeneration of the town is not a priority for Dumfries and Galloway Council. Some interviewees claimed that more attention is paid to areas closer to the commercial and administrative hub of Dumfries. There were some suggestions that the formal administrative boundaries should be reviewed.

Interviewees generally perceived that Langholm has closer connections, in cultural and economic terms, to the north (Hawick and the Borders) and to the south (Carlisle and Cumbria), than it does to the rest of Dumfries and Galloway. That perception is reinforced by the town's public transport links. Regular buses run north to south, while travelling west to Dumfries was reported as being a challenge for those without access to a car.

SURF heard that Langholm's geographical and administrative position, being close to the border of three local government boundaries in addition to the Scotland-England border, was seen as a cause of disadvantage. It was noted that some important facilities, services and educational opportunities, for example, are in Carlisle. In some cases, these are difficult or impossible to access as a result of differing cross border governmental arrangements.

More positively, a number of those consulted enthused about potential opportunities for Langholm people and enterprises via greater cross-border cooperation. Recent policy and administrative developments, including the creation of a Scottish Government supported South of Scotland Enterprise Agency and the Borderlands Growth Deal, were seen as providing prospects for the town to build on its position and strengths as part of a wider strategic shift.

SURF noted that the emergent review of Local Governance, by the Scottish Government in cooperation with the COSLA and others, could be a useful platform for exploring some of the above challenges and opportunities.

#### **4.1(d) Land**

The ownership, use and stewardship of land was referred to by many as being a vital concern for the town, its heritage, its tourism offer and its economic future.

Local people noted the relatively stable historical pattern of Buccleuch Estate owning the vast majority of the land surrounding the town. It was observed that so far, the Scottish Government's community empowerment and land reform policy agenda, had not had a meaningful impact in Langholm and the immediate surrounding geography.

There were concerns regarding recent changes to land use in the hills surrounding Langholm, with the perception that traditional tenant hill farmers were being replaced by commercial forestry. Some saw this as a purely commercial decision, made by the estate in the run-up to a British exit from the European Union. There was concern that it would lead to further de-population, economic decline, and undermine the area's natural heritage offer and its provision of walking/cycling trails.

A representative from the Buccleuch Estate told SURF that the number of farmers leaving the sector was very small; while 23 tenancies had ended, the majority of these farmers had either bought their land or signed new tenancies. The representative also reported that forestry was one of a range of options being considered by the Estate to ensure the long term viability of its commercial business. This commercial business, it was argued, was a clear economic benefit to the town and the surrounding area.

There were mixed opinions on the Buccleuch Estate's support for local regeneration activity. Some interviewees noted that the Estate contributed financially and practically to valued initiatives such as Muckleton Adventure Festival, while others said that they had approached the Estate to discuss relevant ideas and plans but had not received a response.

All parties who raised land as a key issue highlighted the importance of meaningful community consultation and engagement with regard to significant developments in the ownership and management of land in and around the town. Several participants highlighted 2017/18 consultations by the Eskdale Foundation (on proposed reuse of the town's former police station) and Loreburn Housing Association (on a proposed housing and social care development) as open and constructive, providing local engagement models that other bodies could follow.

Muckletoon Adventure Festival, and its success in attracting a large numbers of visitors to the town for a summer festival, was seen as highlighting the fundamental importance of Langholm's natural environment to its future. In addition, Buccleuch Park provides a pleasant green space and community gathering site for local residents.

#### **4.1(e) Community Empowerment**

There was widespread agreement and substantial evidence that Langholm possesses a strong community spirit. The high level of resilience shown by local community members in response to Langholm's economic challenges was partly credited by some to its relative geographic isolation.

Langholm's existing community organisations were felt to be generally efficient, reliable and open to partnership working. Many saw them as helping to meet a social and economic challenges in the town, resulting from changes in the private and public sector. The Buccleuch Centre was highlighted as a particularly substantial community driven success.

There were, however, concerns that aspects of the community's infrastructure can sometimes suffer as a result of local politics and rivalries. This was seen as undermining levels of cooperation and the scope for generating wider and more effective community action.

While most community groups were reported as being effective in designing and delivering individual projects, there was a perceived a lack of shared vision with regard to the future of the town as a whole. Some suggested that the town's interests would be best served through the formation of a single community body to draw the community together and work towards common aims.

Another concern raised was that while Langholm had a strong, active culture of volunteering, community work, and sport club participation, this might not always be the case, particularly if the average age of the local population continues to increase and the local supply of jobs falls.

A number of those consulted highlighted the relative homogeneity of people involved in community activities in Langholm. Some people under the age of 40 said that they felt excluded from the existing structures, while community group leaders reported that efforts to engage younger people in projects and committees were undertaken regularly, but with a lack of impact as a result of those targeted having limited interest or time.

The role of a committed local philanthropist, David Stevenson, in supporting the work of various community group activity was cited to SURF by a majority of feasibility study interviewees.

#### **4.1(f) Housing and Infrastructure**

There was a clear consensus that Langholm needs new housing, especially for younger people and families, for whom suitable affordable housing options are very limited. Housing was seen as essential to the town's long term sustainability, with many viewing it as a means to attract new residents and secure future investments. Sheltered accommodation was also a high priority for many of those consulted.

There was, however, common acknowledgement of the lack of suitable sites for new housing in the town, with the River Esk's floodplain, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's interpretation of the risk posed, providing a major barrier to new development. This is an ongoing issue for a proposed sheltered housing development by Loreburn Housing Association.

Redevelopment of disused public buildings was seen as a possible solution to this issue. In addition to enabling the development of new housing and facilities for the town, this could improve the attractiveness of the town and restore and/or maintain historically significant assets, although refurbishment costs may be onerous in some cases.

Digital infrastructure was regularly cited as a particular issue in Langholm, with a generally slow and/or unreliable digital service reported to SURF. This was particularly damaging, given the town's physical isolation, and was seen as hampering business and tourism.

The development of a new social care facility for the town, possibly including an education and training provision, was seen by many as being a key infrastructure need for the town, with significant potential in retaining families and young people in the town, and attracting new residents.

#### **4.1(g) Transport**

Transport was almost universally seen as a serious issue for the town, due to limited public transport links and a high level of dependence on the A7 trunk road. These issues were viewed as exacerbating the town's already challenging geographic remoteness.

Poor public transport was a particularly important issue for young people and those without access to a car, restricting access to education, jobs, services, and social opportunities. This was seen as a key factor in encouraging outward migration.

Ongoing transport issues are disruptive for local people and discourage visitors. The occasional-to-regular closure of the A7 was cited as a factor in discouraging people and businesses from moving to the town, and a health and safety issue preventing efficient emergency vehicle access. Some people felt that Dumfries and Galloway Council paid insufficient attention to local transport challenges, noting that one road out of the town has been closed for two years.

Local people also highlighted to SURF a lack of signage from the M74 motorway, which caused challenges for visitors and added to a sense of isolation. There were also concerns that the town will not directly benefit from a M74 'regeneration corridor' investment programme.

There was some enthusiasm for the potential of a new train station in the town, which could be delivered in a proposed extension of the Borders Railway to Carlisle, discussions for which are ongoing. A new station was seen as alleviating some of the challenges facing local young people, by providing new commuting possibilities to Borders towns and Edinburgh. A couple of interviewees, however, worried that such an option may result in local residents spending less money in Langholm shops, and more in other towns on the train line.

## **5 Conclusion**

The local stakeholders from community, public, private, academic and charity sectors that SURF engaged with, reported without exception that they would welcome Langholm's participation in the 'Alliance for Action' programme.

There is a clear indication that Langholm stakeholders feel that:

- The town could benefit from the enhanced attention on the town's physical, social and economic development that participation in the 'Alliance for Action' programme may be able to provide;
- The 'Alliance for Action' programme may be able to support greater coordination and collaboration at community level.
- SURF's national partner agency connections, and projects and organisations in other 'Alliance for Action' sites, could be usefully developed to support regeneration activity in Langholm.

Local 'buy-in' of the 'Alliance for Action' approach has been a fundamental element of successful delivery in the other participating communities, and is clearly evident in Langholm. SURF welcomes this local enthusiasm and the specific offers of participation and support that we received in the course of the feasibility study.

In SURF's perspective, the town would make for a valuable addition to the programme. While Langholm has less pressing social and economic challenges than the other 'Alliance for Action' programme sites, as evidenced by the 2016 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation statistics, the rural, small-town and south of Scotland context would provide valuable balance to the existing programme, which is currently weighted towards larger urban areas in the central belt.

SURF is confident that its 'Alliance for Action' approach could help shared efforts to address challenges affecting Langholm and build on existing assets and opportunities.

**We therefore recommend that Langholm becomes the fifth 'Alliance for Action' participant community.**

Having reflected on the local consultation activity summarised briefly in the previous section, the local policy context presented in Appendix B, and the strengths, knowledge and resource base in SURF's network, our view is that the strongest prospects for useful collaborative 'Alliance for Action' activity in Langholm are in the following grouped topics:

- Langholm's economic purpose
- The town's tourist offer
- Community empowerment

In addition, SURF could help to make some useful links to relevant partners, policies and resources in the following areas:

- Transport
- Housing and infrastructure

Finally, SURF could potentially promote some wider awareness and constructive debate on the remaining two areas, which are:

- Political geography
- Land

If this recommendation is agreed locally, SURF would employ a part-time local facilitator, based in the town, to support the successful development and delivery of locally identified priority projects under the identified themes, for an initial period of two years from Autumn 2018.

SURF would oversee the recruitment process, and manage and fully support the local facilitator to add value to the coordination of local plans and initiatives. SURF would also provide additional connections between Langholm aspirations, and regional and national regeneration policies and resources, also contributing to 'Alliance for Action' cross-site activity.

This report is being shared with local stakeholders via email with a view to sourcing feedback on whether SURF's recommendation is welcome. The findings will be formally presented and debated at a public event in Langholm's Buccleuch Centre on the evening of Tuesday 29 May (7:00-8:30pm).

Further updates will be available on the Langholm 'Alliance for Action' page of the SURF website: [www.surf.scot/langholm](http://www.surf.scot/langholm)

SURF is grateful to the Scottish Government, Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland for supporting our feasibility study in Langholm, and to the many stakeholders who contributed their time and energy to the process of engagements.

***End of feasibility study report; two appendices follow***

*Andy Milne, Chief Executive; Derek Rankine, Policy and Participation Manager; Christopher Murray, Research and Administrative Assistant | 25 April 2018*

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## Appendix A: About SURF

### **SURF is Scotland's Regeneration Forum.**

#### *Aims and objectives*

SURF's overall objective is to improve the lives and opportunities of residents in Scotland's disadvantaged communities.

To meet this goal, SURF's key aims are:

- To provide a neutral space for all sectors and players in Scottish community regeneration to share their knowledge and experience;
- To stimulate challenging debate about community regeneration policy and practice;
- To maintain a high status for community regeneration on Scotland's political agenda;
- To provide relevant and constructive feedback to key policy-makers.



#### *SURF network*

The SURF network is the primary arena for debate on community regeneration in Scotland. It acts as a channel for information, consultation and policy proposals, based on the knowledge and experience of its extensive membership and wider connections.

SURF network activity includes seminars, conferences, study visits, international exchanges, the annual SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration, policy influencing, and the distribution of information and comment in a variety of formats.

This all provides a truly independent forum to explore current practice, experience and knowledge, with which to positively influence the development of successful regeneration policy and practice.

#### *Background*

SURF was established in 1992 as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It is directed by a board of voluntary directors drawn from across its wide cross-sector membership of over 250 organisations. It is a charity, registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

SURF members range in size from small community groups to some of Scotland's largest private companies. Membership organisations also include local authorities, housing associations, health boards, academic institutions, professional bodies, voluntary organisations and charities.

Since its inception, SURF has operated from two basic principles:

- Successful and sustainable regeneration is only achievable when all aspects of physical, social, economic and cultural regeneration are addressed in a holistic approach.
- The people who are the intended beneficiaries of any regeneration effort must be meaningfully involved in the process if it is to be successful in planning, implementation and maintenance.

#### *Further Information*

Information on SURF's activities and how to get more involved is readily available on our website: [www.surf.scot](http://www.surf.scot)

Please [click here](#) to sign up to our e-mailing list to keep up-to-date with SURF news and events.



### *SURF in 2018*

Throughout 2018 SURF will be delivering a wide range of activities in four interlinked workstreams:

- **Supporting Practice** through the further development of our investigative [Alliance for Action](#) regeneration research programme;
- **Promoting Success** in the 2017 [SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration](#);
- **Informing and Linking** with our Annual Conference, online magazine and event outcome reports;
- **Developing Policy** by building on our [2016 manifesto process](#) and responding to [policy consultations](#).

Please [click here](#) to download a diagram summary with further information.

## Appendix B: Policy Review

### About This Appendix

Following on from three days of face to face discussions between SURF and local stake holders, and one public event, concerning the possibility of an Alliance for Action in Langholm. SURF has moved on to stage 2 of its feasibility study process. This includes a review of existing literature concerning the town of Langholm itself, and a review of wider relevant policy documentation.

### Scope of Review

The main policy areas considered for review in this paper have been selected to build on the results of two significant studies carried out in Langholm within the past five years, and on SURF's own consultation events and discussions in the town<sup>vi</sup>. The larger of the two was the survey and report produced by the Conservation and Development in Sparsely Populated Areas Trust (CADISPA) in early 2013<sup>vii</sup>, while a smaller more focussed study was conducted by the Langholm Initiative and the Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) later that year entitled: *Langholm Stayin' Alive a Journey to Community Entrepreneurship*<sup>viii</sup>, which examined business sustainability and outward migration from the town. These surveys highlighted a number of issues of particular importance to local people, and to the future of the town more generally. While they are both now almost five years old, SURF considers these studies to still be relevant to Langholm's current situation.

### Statistical Profile<sup>ix</sup>

Langholm, also known as 'The Muckle Toon', is situated within Annandale East and Eskdale Ward. The village is just off the A7 between Edinburgh and Carlisle. Its closest city is Carlisle – around 20 miles south of the town. Canonbie is 6.4 miles to the south while Eskdalemuir is 10 miles north-west of Langholm. Langholm has a relatively small population of 2,227 individuals, in comparison to most neighbouring towns (Moffat, Annan, Gretna and Lockerbie).

In terms of deprivation, as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Langholm compares relatively well to Dumfries and Galloway as a whole; 9% of residents are income deprived compared to an average across Dumfries of 11%, employment deprivation is slightly lower at 8%, compared to a regional average of 10%. Langholm also score favourably in terms of education; with less than 5% of young people not in education, employment or training and 10% going on to full time higher education, 2% higher than the average for Dumfries and Galloway as a whole. The area is among the least health and housing deprived in the country, with low levels of drug and alcohol abuse and overcrowding.

### The Local Economy

The local economy in Langholm has historically been centred on the textile industries and agriculture, however following the decline of large scale manufacturing in the 1980s and 90s it has diversified significantly. Important industries in the town now include; *Agriculture (including beef, dairy, sheep and a limited amount of arable farming), forestry, and upland management/game keeping. Service industries, including health and social care, education, transport and retail. Tourism, entertainment and accommodation.* A large proportion of the towns working age population also commute to Carlisle and Gretna for work. The continued and steady decline of manufacturing over the past twenty years has been the principle economic challenge facing the town, with the last major textile mill closing in 2013. Naturally, these job losses have had a knock on effect on other local industries and services. In 2013 the town's last remaining care home, Dallaran, closed with the loss of 24 jobs<sup>x</sup>. While in the past year there have also been suggestions that one of the towns

remaining major employers; Edinburgh Woollen Mill, which employs around 300 people, may be relocating its office to Carlisle<sup>xi</sup>.

Langholm is largely dependent on small scale businesses for employment. The CADISPA study found that:

*“local employment within the area is much more reliant on smaller businesses than the UK as a whole. Out of an assessed 312 employers within the study area, fewer than 30 are thought to employ more than 10 people each, and many of these are public sector/service organisations. Accurate statistics for the area are not available but statistics suggest that around a third of the local population are employed with ‘larger’ companies (more than 10 employees) whilst the figure for the nation as a whole is 62%, well over half”.*

This is consistent with the region as a whole with 55% of Dumfries and Galloway’s work force employed by small businesses<sup>xii</sup>. The type of jobs available in the region also raises issues for its long term economic future, with 30.7% of employees earning below the living wage.

At a national level, the diversification of rural employment; moving away from rural areas being dependant on one or two industries, has been a long term policy goal of the Scottish Government<sup>xiii</sup>. However, Scottish Enterprise has argued that rural economic policy has remained largely focussed on agriculture and other land based industries<sup>xiv</sup>. In its 2008 study on Scotland’s rural economy the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) called for “*distinct vision of policy for all rural areas*” which is “*comprehensive and integrated, capable of mixing sectoral and territorial approaches and developing linkages and exchanges, between the agricultural sector (farmers and land managers) and the other sectors of the rural economy*”. They argued that this should be supported by an integrated place-based approach to rural development<sup>xv</sup>.

Regionally, Dumfries and Galloway is facing a number of wider economic issues. Namely, a Gross Value Added (GVA) that is well below the Scottish average, an ageing population, a low wage economy and a high rate of youth unemployment<sup>xvi</sup>. Furthermore, spending on R&D per head of population in Dumfries and Galloway is well below the national average<sup>xvii</sup>. New business start-ups in the region have largely remained static, failing to reflect improvement at a national level.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that many communities in the region, like Langholm, are remote and rural and therefore face additional barriers when connecting with the wider regional and national economy. This is in line with wider analysis from the Hutton Institute which has found that small and less accessible rural towns face significantly larger barriers to socioeconomic development than accessible rural areas<sup>xviii</sup>. Rural areas in general are also more likely to be effected adversely by the impact of Brexit on the Scottish economy, this is partly due to the importance of agriculture and land based industries to rural economies and also to the loss of EU structural funding<sup>xix</sup>.

The most recent Dumfries and Galloway Regional Economic Strategy (2016-2020)<sup>xx</sup> identifies a series of opportunities and potential growth areas for the region’s economy, a number of these are of particular relevance to Langholm;

- *Major assets such as the rural landscape and coast are key resources for its tourism industry. Our region’s attractiveness is also important in making Dumfries and Galloway a desirable place to live and work. Our natural resources provide opportunities in forestry and renewable energy, particularly on and off-shore wind energy that can be developed*

*to maximise community benefit. The micro renewables sector has growth potential at community level.*

- *Older people can make a positive contribution to the workforce and the economy while the ageing population presents opportunities for private and third sector developments in the health and social care sectors.*
- *The high number of micro-businesses provides a broad base of businesses that have potential for growth.*
- *Dumfries and Galloway Council has invested £12.6m in the region’s broadband infrastructure and the region is benefiting from a share of a national investment of £264m. Access to high speed data links is being rolled out across the region during the early years of our Strategy.*

In addition, a number of wider factors are considered to enhance the regions long term economic prospects;

- *The quality of life in the region is highly rated with low crime rates and high quality schools*
- *Our communities are resilient and capable of delivering innovative solutions to local challenges and this provides an excellent base from which to grow the region’s social economy.*

This document also identifies the regions key economic sectors, both in terms of existing importance and prospects of growth, and where investment and energy will be directed (see table below):

Volume	Value
<p>This relates to sectors which, while still valuable, provide lower levels of productivity and are often seasonal. Whilst currently providing lower value economic growth opportunities, these sectors are of particular economic importance to our rural and coastal areas. The performance of these sectors ensures a level of resilience in the local economy, and may provide opportunities for added value and innovation given the right support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Creative Industries (cultural business)</li> <li>• Food and drink</li> <li>• Health and social care</li> <li>• Tourism/leisure/hospitality</li> </ul>	<p>Those sectors with identified growth potential and which are in a position to provide more highly paid, skilled employment. Some of these already have a strong presence within the local economy while the opportunities from others are just beginning to emerge. There is an opportunity to grow these sectors and move them further up the value chain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative Industries (digital business)</li> <li>• Energy - particularly renewables and their supply chain</li> <li>• Forest and timber technologies</li> </ul>

A number of these sectors are already active in Langholm, however the extent to which the businesses in question are capable of growing and sustaining the local economy in the longer run is less clear, given the general tendency for rural businesses to be ‘low growth’<sup>xxi</sup>. A 2017 cross party summit facilitated by the SRUC highlighted a number of key factors in overcoming barriers to growth in the rural economy, including; the importance of microfinance, flexibility in terms of business support, effective cooperation through the planning system and the need for more concerted engagement with farmers as part of a wider economic strategy<sup>xxii</sup>.

The most recent Main Issue Report (Jan 2017) from the Dumfries & Galloway Local Plan has identified no new land for business and commercial purposes in the town. However the plan notes the availability of former mill sites for re-development and re-use in line with other policies<sup>xxiii</sup>.

## Tourism

As noted above, the tourism and hospitality industries currently make up a significant proportion of Langholm's economy, and are areas in which Dumfries and Galloway council plans for future growth. Tourism is worth around 300 million pounds to the regional economy and employs around 70,000 people in the region. Nationally, policy makers have noted the importance of small towns to the Scotland's "unique tourism product" and to its wider tourist economy<sup>xxiv</sup>.

The CADISPA report identifies the high quality local environment along with the areas heritage as the principle tourist draws for Langholm and the surrounding areas. The town is situated in some of the most unspoiled countryside in Southern Scotland, with numerous walking and cycling routes nearby. A number of outdoors activity festivals take place in the area, most notably the 'Muckletoon Adventure Festival', which is in its 5<sup>th</sup> year. The town has one tourist information centre, open seasonally, which is managed by the Langholm Initiative and staffed by local volunteers. A local museum dedicated to the Clan Armstrong, a historic Border Reiving family, has recently been renovated. This is located in Gilnockie Tower, a 16<sup>th</sup> century tower house, four and half miles south of Langholm.

The Dumfries and Galloway Tourism Strategy (2016-2020)<sup>xxv</sup> aims to; increase the volume of tourism to the region, the volume and length of stay from tourists and the number of jobs related to the tourism sector. The strategy highlights a number of growth sectors for tourism in the region. Nature and adventure tourism are seen as particularly important the region's future tourist draw, as are culture and heritage attractions. This is significant given Langholm's existing attractions and infrastructure. The plan identifies a number of barriers that need to be overcome to ensure that the region reaches its potential in this area. The provision of both physical and digital infrastructure, to ease access to the regions attractions is essential. Furthermore, there is a need for the regions hospitality providers to be equipped with the suitable skills and training to take advantage of new opportunities to grow their businesses, this is particularly important with regard to IT skills and marketing.

With regard to small towns more generally Visit Scotland has highlighted the importance of;

- *Clarifying the role of small towns; their chief qualities, purpose, services, unique events and all round offer for visitors.*
- *Assessing the quality of product being offered to ensure high standards on information, service and accommodation.*
- *Consider the possibilities to restyle Tourist Information Centres as Information Centres with other services such as internet cafes, libraries and Council information/service centres.*
- *Support for the development of local integrated websites.*
- *Person to person skills training for tourism providers and business/retail operators.*
- *Assessing the possibilities of links to other towns and the formation of local clusters of small towns; working together to address town centre management, promotion etc.*

These recommendations highlight a number of possible ways in which the existing community run tourism infrastructure in Langholm could possibly be developed, with a view to creating a more cohesive tourism offer. With this aim in mind it has been suggested by some that Langholm follow the example of Dumfries and Galloway's existing 'theme' towns; Wigtown, Kirkcudbright and Castle Douglas. These towns have each focussed their branding and tourism offer on a single theme; books, art and food respectively. These efforts have been considered to have been a success, both in terms

of increased visitor numbers and spending but also in terms of generating 'social capital' for the wider community<sup>xxvi</sup>.

The 'Theme Town' branding exercises required the cooperation of a wide range of external and internal actors working towards a common goal, this process in itself has been regarded as almost as significant as the 'theme' itself in revitalising the towns in question. A similar approach in Langholm would require agreement on a suitable theme; while Kirkcudbright and Castle Douglas both had existing associations with art and food respectively, Wigtown's association with books was largely created as part of the branding exercise.

## **Town Centre Regeneration**

Town centres across Scotland have faced significant challenges in recent times. This has largely been due to the decline of town centre retail which has led to a decline in footfall and investment<sup>xxvii</sup>. This has led to the creation of the Town Centre Action Plan<sup>xxviii</sup> by the Scottish Government in 2013 and the creation of a new body, Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP), to support the action plans aims. Central to these is a 'town centre first' principle which aims to make the health of town centres a priority at all levels of decision making.

In Langholm the health of the town centre has been a concern to local people, this was evident in the results of the CADISPA survey and in the work of the Langholm Regeneration Group, which is made up of local traders. Of particular concern is the state of the High Street, which has a number of empty units. Some also considered it unsafe, remaining a trunk road as the A7 passes through the town. There was also a desire for more shops in the town centre and better promotion of local businesses.

At a national level a number of new initiatives have been pursued to create more vibrant town centres, these have included; measures to encourage town centre living, the creation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and more recently the launch of the Digital Towns initiative by STP which encourages the use of technology to create innovative solutions for town centres<sup>xxix</sup>. This year Dumfries and Galloway Council launched a new town centre living fund of one million pounds with money allocated to build new homes, improve existing properties and bring derelict buildings back into use<sup>xxx</sup>.

## **Community Empowerment and Land Ownership**

Community empowerment is a central goal of Scottish Government regeneration policy; this widely shared aspiration has been afforded practical application in the Community Empowerment Act (2015) and the Land Reform Act (2016). This legislation has built and expanded upon the success of the earlier Land Reform Act (2003). The Scottish Government's has committed itself to diversifying land ownership in Scotland, the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement<sup>xxxi</sup> also calls for land to be managed in the 'public interest'. The expansion of community land ownership is seen as particularly desirable; being central to wider community empowerment. The Scottish Land Fund is the principle funding body for community land ownership and has received increased funding through to 2020. Community empowerment and development is seen as a means by which to help improve a range of wider outcomes; including environmental and health objectives<sup>xxxii</sup>.

In addition to the emphasis on land ownership, communities have also been granted a number of rights in relation to public services and assets. Communities can now make 'participation requests' to local authorities, requiring community involvement in public services which are perceived as underperforming. They are now also able to register an interest in buying, leasing or managing public land and buildings, initiating an 'asset transfer' process where a benefit to the community is

demonstrated. Furthermore the bill provides statutory reinforcement to the existing Community Planning process, requiring the production of a Local Outcome Improvement Plan for each Community Planning Partnership along with more localised 'locality plans'. This legislation has been supported by the provision of a number of funding streams accessible to communities, these include; the Strengthening Communities Program, the People and Communities Fund, the Aspiring Communities Fund and the Community Choices Fund.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has committed to ensuring that local people and communities are at the heart of decision making and that communities are empowered to make the most of their assets<sup>xxxiii</sup>. The council believe that they are currently on target to meet these objectives with a number of indicators showing clear progress; in 2016/17 the council supported 330 community groups in delivering services and 58 properties were in the process of being transferred to community ownership. The transfer of Langholm Day Centre, a community project which provides support to the elderly, from the council to community control was completed in February 2017.

Langholm has a number of well-established and active community groups. The Langholm Initiative is a registered charity runs a number of projects locally. These include; *Building a Future for Eskdale* which is a skills development program and a number of projects working around the areas natural environment. These are funded on a project by project basis: *Building a Future for Eskdale* has been funded by the Bank of Scotland's 'Skills and Opportunities Fund', while the *South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project* has received project funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and LEADER Scottish Borders & D&G. Another local community group of similar in scale is the Eskdale Foundation, who are a community development trust and a member of DTAS. They are also a Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status and members of SCVO. The foundation was heavily involved in the financing and construction of the towns Eskdale Sport and Leisure Centre, while it was also responsible for the re-development of the former care home at Greenbank into housing. Four apartments in the complex are owned by the foundation and rented to local elderly people. The foundation also owns a charity shop situated on the towns high street, profits from this and its other enterprises are channelled back into the community via micro-grants and physical improvements and allow the organisation to be largely self-financed. Langholm also has an active community council with 10/15 voting positions filled.

It is generally accepted that, while this legislative commitment to community empowerment has opened up a wider range of possibilities for community led development, not all communities are equally well placed to take advantage. In some communities the organisation and running of a suitable community body adequately equipped to take on new responsibilities has proven a barrier to community empowerment<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Given the existence of well-established community organisations this would not be expected to be a problem in Langholm. Balancing competing priorities and aims could however be an issue, this was noted in the CADISPA survey. Moreover, although Langholm currently has a strong culture of community activity and volunteering, this may not always be the case in future, this was also noted in the survey.

Other barriers to community empowerment vary based on particular contexts and the activities proposed. A 2015 study<sup>xxxv</sup> commissioned by the Scottish Government found that barriers to community land use schemes included; unknown or divided ownership to land, unacceptable terms of sale and owners unwilling to sell. In addition to these a number of more general structural barriers to community organisation can also play a role. These included; inability to raise appropriate funding, limitations on advisory support and also issues around project legitimacy. Finally the report found a number of cases where community enthusiasm and interest was an issue, this was particularly the case in protracted and complex purchase processes. The Community Empowerment

Act has aimed to address a number of these issues, particularly those relating to community engagement and capacity<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

## Housing

The issue of housing was raised extensively by local people in both the CADISPA study and in the SRUC/Langholm Initiative study. Local people have reported difficulty in finding homes to suit their needs, while young people in particular have identified affordable housing as a key concern.

The overall estimated housing need for the Eskdale housing market area (HMA), of which Langholm is the main centre, between 2016 and 2029 has been calculated at 84 new homes, with half of these to be affordable<sup>xxxvii</sup>. This is a significant reduction from previous estimates. However, while the Eskdale HMA is one of the more affordable areas of Dumfries and Galloway there is still a significant gap between average earnings and house prices, this acts as a clear barrier to home ownership and raises demand for accommodation in the social and private rented sectors<sup>xxxviii</sup>. It is also worth noting that Langholm as the main centre of the Eskdale HMA is likely to experience increased prices and demand compared to surrounding outlying areas. Furthermore, Eskdale has a higher rate of under occupation and a higher number of single households than the national averages<sup>xxxix</sup>. This is consistent with figures for Dumfries and Galloway as a whole, contained in the 2016 HNDA, which show a mismatch between house hold composition and stock profile.

House building in the Eskdale area is limited by a number of physical factors; principally the areas rural character, with few large settlements, and the risk of flooding which effects a number of possible larger sites in area. Housing development is also closely related to the wider economic and social trajectory of the area. Like other rural areas the majority of house building in Langholm and Eskdale as whole takes place on small sites of five or less units.

The most recent Main Issue Report (Jan 2017) from the Dumfries and Galloway Local Plan allocated three possible small sites for housing development in Langholm<sup>xl</sup>. Development of these sites is however dependant on suitable development proposals from either private or RSL developers. Private development in Dumfries has faced significant challenges since the 2008 financial crash, with completion rates remaining low<sup>xli</sup>. The most recent Strategic Housing and Investment Plan (SHIP) for Dumfries and Galloway outlined funding and deliverability for 902 units of affordable housing between 2016 and 2020. This is in line with the Scottish governments More Homes for Scotland policy, which aims to deliver 50,000 new homes nationally by 2021. Loreburn Housing Associations recent development of 10 units of sheltered accommodation at Armstrong Court was part of the 2016 SHIP, however this was the only planned development for the Eskdale HMA.

Langholm has a number of existing units of community developed housing; the Eskdale Foundation redeveloped a former care home at Greenbank in partnership with a private developer. It owns four of the units itself, renting them to local elderly people at an affordable rate. Community led and owned housing has become increasingly prevalent in rural communities, this has been seen as a natural extension of land reform and the community empowerment agenda advanced by the Scottish Government. Community involvement in housing has taken various forms, some communities have simply highlighted housing need and development opportunities to existing providers; others have taken the lead in financing, building and managing properties<sup>xlii</sup>. Community led housing development has proven particularly effective in delivering affordable housing on small sites. These initiatives have been supported by a number of funding streams<sup>xliii</sup>; in 2016 the Scottish Government announced the creation of the Rural Housing Fund, which is accessible to a wide range of groups beyond existing housing providers<sup>xliiv</sup>.



A particular need for sheltered accommodation has been identified in Langholm. This is evident from both the CADISPA survey and from SURFs own discussions. This is supported by the demographic shifts taking place both locally and nationally. In line with national trends Dumfries and Galloway will see a decline in the working age population and an increase in the number of over 65s. The former is set to decline by 14% while the latter is due to increase by 46%. The number of over 85s in the region is in line to increase even faster, doubling within the next 20 years. Given the existing population of Langholm, which is already demographically imbalanced these trends will clearly have an impact on the community's future development.

The Dumfries & Galloway Joint Strategic Plan for Older People 2012 – 2022<sup>xiv</sup> highlights a number of issues arising from these shifts. The number of older people living alone in Dumfries and Galloway is set to rise by 22% in the next 10 years, the number of households containing someone over 75 is set to increase by 27% in the same period; this is twice the national average. Many of these individuals and households are in remote rural locations like Langholm, with restricted access to services. The report notes that: *“These changes are important in how we develop services to maximise independence and support people living at home. Developing appropriate housing and care options will be a particularly key consideration in planning for the future”*. Recent consultations have been held in Langholm regarding the development of ‘extra care housing’ in Langholm. This is being proposed by a partnership between Loreburn Housing Association and the area’s integrated health and social care board.

## Transport

Transport was identified as a particular issue for Langholm in the CADISPA survey; with residents identifying public transport routes and timetabling as a barrier to accessing employment and services. This has been supported by wider research with Langholm and the surrounding area identified as a high risk area for ‘transport poverty’ by Sustrans<sup>xvi</sup>. Langholm is relatively well connected to Carlisle to the south and Edinburgh to the north with hourly buses. Connections to the west are far poorer, with multiple changes required to reach Dumfries and Stranraer. By road, Langholm is located on the A7 which facilitates travel north to south, however again routes west and east are more awkward.

Temporary closures of the A7 can leave the town effectively cut off from the North or the South, the local Taras Road west of the town towards Newcastleton has been closed for two years. Locals have also raised the issue of lack of signage to Langholm from the M74 which are perceived as having a negative effect on tourism and compounding the town’s relative isolation. This is particularly relevant given the substantial investments being made by Dumfries and Galloway Council and other agencies in the M74 ‘regeneration corridor’.

Regionally, Dumfries and Galloway faces a number of barriers to effective transport in common with other largely rural areas. These include; higher travel costs and distances, lack of rail services and a reliance on often infrequent bus services<sup>xvii</sup>. These issues are of particular importance to residents without access to a car, young people and those with limited mobility. Nationally, groups such as Citizens Advice<sup>xviii</sup> and the Scottish Rural Parliament<sup>xlix</sup> have campaigned on rural transport issues, arguing that improving transport infrastructure is essential to achieving wider economic and social goals. The Scottish Government has acknowledged that overcoming these challenges and improving access to transport in rural areas is of equal importance to larger headline infrastructure projects.

Public transport in Dumfries and Galloway is overseen by Swestrans which is the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for the South West of Scotland. In addition to its core planning functions Swestrans is responsible for the delivery of subsidies on non-commercial bus routes, this is

permitted where routes are essential to local communities but unattractive to private operators. 46% of Dumfries and Galloway's bus routes are privately operated and owned, the remaining 56% are run by Swestrans. Patronage is an issue for local bus services, with an average of 7 users per bus service across the region, this limits viability for commercial operators, even when subsidised.

A number of possible options have been suggested to overcome these challenges, including allowing Dumfries and Galloway Council to operate as a public service vehicle operator and changing legislation to allow community transport organisations to expand their role in delivering local services. More generally there is a desire to allow local communities increased control over pricing and timetabling<sup>i</sup>. The Scottish Government and Transport Scotland have committed to producing a new Transport Bill which will “*provide local transport authorities with a viable and flexible set of options to ensure that their bus services meet local users' needs*”<sup>ii</sup>. This suggests that Dumfries and Galloway Council may be given new powers in this area.

Investment in rail has also been suggested as a possible solution Langholm's disconnection, this is in view of possible plans to extend the existing Borders rail link to Carlisle, further along the historic Waverley route closed in 1969. The current rail link, reopened in 2015, runs from Edinburgh through the Scottish Borders to Tweedbank. A station in Langholm is one of the options being considered as part of the feasibility study for the project, however, nearby Newcastleton would appear to be the more natural location for a station given that it was on the original Waverley Route. The feasibility study is expected to be completed later this year.

## Geographic Boundaries

Langholm is located on the edge of the Dumfries and Galloway administrative area. In functional reality, the town is better connected to the Scottish Borders and Cumbria than it is to the infrastructure and interactions Dumfries and Galloway. There is a sense amongst some locals, expressed at SURFs consultation event, that the town is not a priority for Dumfries and Galloway Council, with the perception that more attention is paid to areas closer to the commercial and administrative hub that is Dumfries. This has led to the argument from some quarters that the town would benefit from being reassigned to the Scottish Borders administrative region.

The geographic boundaries of Scotland's administrative regions are overseen by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland. The current 32 local government regions were created in 1995 and have seen little substantive revision since. Any such reviews in the last 20 years reviews have been limited to cases where development has taken place and housing or business premises have been sited partly in one administrative area and partly in another. Dumfries and Galloway's boundaries are long established, with the current administrative region replicating the area previously covered by Dumfries and Galloway District Council, in place since 1975.

Prior to this, Dumfries and Galloway District was made up of the historic counties of Wigtownshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Dumfriesshire; Langholm being part of Dumfriesshire. There is little recent precedent for a substantial one off revision of an administrative boundary. Previous boundary revisions have taken place as part of large scale review processes, instigated by changes to legislation.

It is generally accepted that there is a tension between 'administrative' and 'functional' regions, in terms of both planning and development<sup>iii</sup>, with economic and social ties cutting across administrative boundaries. New regional plans and funding streams such as the proposed Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal<sup>iiii</sup> and the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency<sup>iv</sup> represent possible means by which some of these difficulties may be overcome.

## Land

The issue of land ownership and use in Scotland has received a great deal of attention in both government policy considerations, in the media and in wider public discourse in recent years. This resulting momentum for appropriate action, has found legislative effect most recently in the Land Reform Act (2016), which built on the success of the 2003 act of the same name. In its 'Statement of Land, Rights and Responsibilities' published following the passage of the bill, the Scottish Government has committed to;

- Adopting a broad human rights-based approach to land rights, responsibilities and policies
- A more diverse pattern of land ownership
- Providing local communities with more opportunities to purchase land
- Ensuring land owners utilise their rights in the common interest
- Greater transparency around land ownership
- Greater collaboration and community engagement regarding land use.

These aims have been supported by the creation of the Scottish Land Commission, a new public body, which will “provide direction, leadership and strategic thought to land reform in Scotland”. The commission’s priorities for 2018-21 are; increasing the availability of land for housing development, diversifying land ownership, improving transparency around land use and, finally, work around tenant farming and the wider agricultural sector<sup>lv</sup>.

These national priorities clearly intersect with a number of local issues in Langholm. The Eskdale Foundation are in the process of seeking to purchase the towns former police station, this has been supported by the Scottish Land Fund. The issue of land use and tenant farming has also received a good deal of attention locally with controversy surrounding change of land use, from tenant hill farming to forestry, on the Buccleuch Estate<sup>lvilviiiviii</sup>.

The Estate is by far the largest land owner in the area, and the second largest in Scotland. Re-forestation is generally seen as desirable by the Scottish Government for both economic and environmental reasons<sup>lix</sup>. The current wave of changes is also linked to a government push to phase out the 'limited partnership' tenancies which have historically been used for hill farms<sup>lix</sup>. Land use changes are also increasingly perceived to be a response to the expected impact of Brexit, with Britain’s exit from the Common Agricultural Policy threatening the financial viability of hill farming in the longer term<sup>lxi</sup>.

The Buccleuch Estate has argued that while twenty three farming tenancies have been terminated the vast majority of the farmers in question have either bought their land or been offered new tenancies<sup>lxii</sup>. The changes have however been seen by some locals as a threat to both the communities character and economy; as one Langholm farmer has noted;

*“If a couple of dozen farms are turned over to forestry, that’s a lot of families not using local suppliers and local shops: it is children not using local schools. It is the community that will disappear, not just the farms.”<sup>lxiii</sup>*

The issue of land use around Langholm is closely linked to the future of the wider community, both socially and economically, as it is for any regeneration context across Scotland. As such there is a need for meaningful effective community consultation and engagement on the issue locally, in line with Scottish Government policy. SURF’s own recent discussion with a representative of Buccleuch Estates, in the course of this feasibility study, indicated their interest in supporting and contributing to such a process.

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## End of appendices

For more information on SURF's 'Alliance for Action' programme in Langholm, please visit:

[www.surf.scot/langholm](http://www.surf.scot/langholm)

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