



# The Delivery of Regeneration in Scotland

*A SURF response to the March 2013 Scottish Parliament  
Local Government and Regeneration Committee inquiry*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 About SURF

As Scotland's independent regeneration network, SURF draws on its extensive cross-sector membership of over 250 organisations, to explore current practice, experience and knowledge in community regeneration.

Since 1992, SURF has been providing a neutral and constructive space to promote and facilitate the sharing of information, ideas and outcomes. It does so through a diverse programme of activities that includes seminars, conferences, policy exchanges, lectures, study visits, awards for best practice, and the distribution of information and comment in a variety of accessible formats.

The resulting feedback from the SURF membership is used to positively inform the development of more successful regeneration policy through SURF's links with key policy-makers in the Scottish Government and influencers elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

SURF's ultimate aim is to help improve the wellbeing and opportunities of individuals and communities across Scotland

### 1.2 Defining Regeneration

In SURF's experience, there is no one universally accepted definition of regeneration. SURF agrees with the view expressed by its former Chair, Alistair Grimes of Rocket Science, that in reality, regeneration is more like a mystery than a puzzle. By this we mean that lack of information is not the main problem (as it is in a classic puzzle); rather, it is how we make sense of the already available information and use it to understand what our options for action are.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information is available on the SURF website: [www.scotregen.co.uk](http://www.scotregen.co.uk)

The challenge is therefore to be able to identify and grasp available opportunities for authentic action in a shifting scene, not one of constantly searching for the last bit of information that might finally reveal a complete picture.

In a 2005 edition of SURF's regeneration policy journal, *Scotregen*, a number of leading regeneration experts from the SURF network elaborated on their understanding of the word. In his contribution, Professor Greg Lloyd, former Head of School of Town & Regional Planning in the University of Dundee (now with the University of Ulster), noted that the term 'regeneration' is a "layered and contested term".<sup>2</sup>

While there was a natural diversity in the various disciplinary and experiential perspectives offered, there was general consensus on the view expressed by Alisdair McIntosh, now Scottish Government Director for Housing, Regeneration and Welfare, when he said that the aim is to "secure an improved quality of life for local people". There was also general agreement that regeneration is a holistic process that should focus on achieving positive outcomes for poorer neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup>

SURF generally agrees with the Scottish Government's current definition:

*"Regeneration is the holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces alone won't suffice."*<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, SURF argues that successful and sustainable regeneration is only achievable when all aspects of physical, social and economic regeneration are addressed in a holistic approach. It is a process of substantial change and not simply repair and maintenance activity.

SURF would also add that the ultimate purpose of any authentic regeneration initiative should be to improve the health and wellbeing of residents of disadvantaged communities. If this is not the clearly stated goal intended outcome, then the activity or investment in question cannot, in SURF's view, justly be describes as regeneration.

SURF further contends that:

- Regeneration can only be properly understood in the context of degeneration and the forces that initiate or accelerate that decline;
- In order to inform and sustain the success of investment, the intended beneficiaries of any regeneration process should be meaningfully involved in its planning, and implementation;
- There is no one ideal, universal model for regeneration. In the real world, communities have widely varying backgrounds, needs, assets and opportunities. There is,

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<sup>2</sup> "What do we mean by regeneration?": Scotregen Issue 32, Autumn/Winter 2005, p1. Available online at: [http://www.scotregen.co.uk/pdf.pl?file=surf/news/issue\\_32.pdf](http://www.scotregen.co.uk/pdf.pl?file=surf/news/issue_32.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Achieving a Sustainable Future: National Regeneration Strategy*, Scottish Government, December 2011, p2. Available online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/364595/0123891.pdf>

nonetheless, considerable scope for enhancing shared understanding and cooperation towards appropriate, timely and effective action.

## 2 Policy and Practice

SURF's perspective on selected inquiry themes of interest are as follows. In this section we have tried to respond directly to four of the questions suggested by the Committee.

### 2.1 Physical, Social and Economic Aspects

**Question:** *“Can physical, social and economic regeneration really be separate entities? The Committee would find it useful to hear about projects distinctly focussed on one or more aspects, and the direct and indirect outcomes of such activity.”*

SURF's position, as stated in section 1.2, is that a truly holistic and sustainable regeneration effort will address physical, social, economic, as well as cultural and environmental, challenges and opportunities in the community in which it operates.

It is conceivable that, in relatively rare instances, a community will only require one particular dimension of regenerative support. In the great majority of disadvantaged communities in Scotland – normally those in the 15% most deprived Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation datazones – physical, social and economic problems are usually evident. In many cases all three broad sets of issues stem from the same underlying structural cause, such as the decline of a seminal local industry, or physical dislocation as a result of other developments. The consequential impacts tend to overlap and inter-link so closely that it is inefficient and ineffective to attempt to tackle one in isolation from the others.

With regard to specific examples of strong projects that are focused on multiple aspects, SURF can draw on a substantial body of independently assessed successful initiatives. Each year, SURF organises an annual awards scheme to highlight best practice in community regeneration. The annual SURF Awards are delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government and independently assessed by judging teams composed of national regeneration agency professionals and experienced community activists.

Since 2006, SURF has been annually producing an accessible and widely distributed publication summarising up to 20 shortlisted SURF Awards regeneration initiatives from across Scotland. These publications are freely available from the SURF website and provide a valuable resource to regeneration practitioners, policy advisers and academics.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration*. Annual publication archive available online at: <http://www.scotregen.co.uk/knowledge/good.asp>

Two recent SURF Award winning projects that we will highlight by way of example are:

**Dedridge Environmental Ecology Project (DEEP)**

*Winner of the 2011 'Place' category SURF Award*

The community-led DEEP project was formed with a view to improving and enhancing a previously neglected and severely polluted local pond area, watercourse and woodland in the Dedridge area of Livingston, West Lothian. The area has since been transformed into an attractive community asset with a popular nature trail, original artwork, wetland birds, and picnic areas.

As well as restoring community pride and contributing considerably to the area's physical regeneration, the initiative has a strong social element in hosting community events and activities, and enabling local people of all ages to benefit from access to natural heritage. Improving a community's appearance so significantly additionally contributes positively to its potential to attract new business investment.

**Playbusters**

*Winner of the 2009 'People' category SURF Award*

Playbusters is a community-run organisation that provides a wide range of educational and practical projects for children and families across nine disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the east end of Glasgow. The SURF Awards judging panel for 2009 were greatly impressed with this project's success in responding to high community demand for educational workshops and environmental programmes.

The achievements the panel highlighted included: the enthusiasm among local schoolchildren for after-school learning classes; the number of young volunteers who progressed into employment following their work with the project; the establishment of attractive community gardens & allotments; and the tackling of social isolation through popular inter-generational events and gatherings.

<b>2.2 Delivery Mechanisms</b>
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**Question:** *"What delivery mechanisms, co-ordination of, and information on the funding that supports regeneration are required, to facilitate access by all sections of the community?"*

**Task, tools and models.**

The 'tools' required for a specific task depends upon the nature of the challenge. There is no 'one size fits all' panacea for regenerating a disadvantaged area. As in any undertaking embarked upon with a reasonable prospect of success, the first priority is to accurately define the situation and the task.

Only then is it possible to select the correct tools, resources and the timescale required. SURF therefore welcomes the breadth of well tested community engagement models available; from informal associations and online collaborations to community development trusts and social enterprises.

### **Accessible resources**

In recent years, many SURF members have indicated a desire for more accessible information on the funding available to support regeneration activities. A large number of public agencies and third sector bodies are engaged in the funding of regeneration initiatives, some with frequently changing aims and criteria.

Given this and the frequent emergence of new community based groups, it is not surprising that there is some lack of awareness of what is potentially available to them. The availability of time and bureaucratic capacity to complete what are often complex application processes is a common problem. They are often just too busy trying to cope with sharply increasing local needs. Providing accessible, timely and useful information to these groups is a priority for all of us who want to see increasing levels of successful community led regeneration.

SURF understands that the Scottish Government's Regeneration Unit is in the process of compiling an accessible list of all Scottish Government funding streams that support community led regeneration. This is welcome but understandable urges to 'streamline' different funds into a unified channel with a single point of entry should be resisted. The diversity of situation, nature and assets in communities previously referred to in this paper, represents a strength in a constantly changing world. A well described and reasonably accessible variety of options which reflects and supports that creative diversity is more likely to meet local needs and produce useful outcomes than a single, centrally managed fund.

### **Learning from experience**

With regard to delivery vehicles for larger scale regional regeneration processes, SURF remains keen to see some methodical drawing out of transferrable learning from the establishment and operation of the six Scottish Urban Regeneration Companies over the last decade. These substantial, place focused, special regeneration delivery bodies, most of which are in the process of being wound-down in terms of dedicated Scottish Government support, represent a significant investment of public funds.

SURF is aware of some of their successes and some of the big challenges they have attempted to take on. The learning from that substantial investment of time effort and money for continuing and future regeneration efforts in the rest of Scotland, is yet to be realised. The benefits of, and barriers to, sustaining public-private partnerships in longer term, place-based approaches is a particular area of wide and contemporary interest.

### **Linking national support and local action**

With support from the Scottish Government, Resilient Scotland Ltd and other partners, SURF is currently developing an 'Alliance for Action' based on earlier participative research on the impact of the recession and the responses emerging from disadvantaged communities and their regeneration partners. The main purpose of this 2013-15 collaborative learning and activities programme is to develop appropriate and effective connections between national regeneration agencies and local community stakeholders in two case study disadvantaged communities. The

connections and practical activity will both enhance local community regeneration outcomes and draw out transferrable learning for policy and practice across Scotland.<sup>5</sup>

### **Infrastructure and Social benefits**

At the larger scale end of regeneration activity, SURF has been examining the links between public funded infrastructure investment and social benefits. Our investigative research and discussions over 2011 confirmed that evidence on the true level of social benefits that arise from infrastructure projects is inadequate yet often overstated.

Nonetheless, SURF still holds the view that there is considerable scope for achieving greater social value from this substantial use of limited public funds. How this shared goal might be realised will be explored in a special SURF national conference involving Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Nicola Sturgeon, and a range of high profile projects and practitioners on 29 May 2013 in Edinburgh.<sup>6</sup>

On a related point, SURF noted in its October 2012 response to the Scottish Government's Procurement Reform Bill policy consultation that:

*"...the present administration is wisely concerned with reconsidering what represents 'best value' in the current recession and the most efficient means of supporting beneficial outcomes in economic, social and physical regeneration across its key policies. This being the case, the present review of public procurement processes should include more consideration of the actual impact of the Hub procurement initiative; currently this influential model is referred to only briefly in the substantial [Procurement Reform Bill] consultation paper."*

## **2.3 Community Capacity Building**

**Question:** *"What actions could the Scottish Government's forthcoming community capacity building programme include to best support communities to 'do regeneration' themselves?"*

### **Rhetoric and Reality**

The Scottish Government's enthusiasm for community led regeneration, and the opportunities for progress that feature in the forthcoming Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill and Capacity Building Programme is as welcome as it is overdue.

A substantial section of the SURF membership frequently comment on the all too obvious mismatch between the Scottish Government's rhetoric on this aspiration, and the level of investment that it is presently committing to community empowerment enhancing processes.

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<sup>5</sup> *What is the Alliance for Action?* SURF website. Available online at:

<http://www.scotregen.co.uk/knowledge/faqs.asp?Itemid=1638>

<sup>6</sup> *Truths and Myths: Infrastructure and Social Benefits.* A SURF Conference planned for 29 May 2013 in Edinburgh. Event details available online at:

<http://www.scotregen.co.uk/events/default.asp?ItemID=1636>

We hope that the eventual enactment of the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill will begin to address this reality gap. As we noted in our response to the Bill's consultation paper in September 2012:

*"In order to achieve equality of impact and participation, the [Community Empowerment & Renewal] Bill must address directly the importance of building the capacity of community organisations where required, and developing the capacity of communities to become organised... we have found wide agreement that community capacity building will be integral to the effective delivery of the Bill's key components."*

Some existing community capacity building programmes, such as the Scottish Community Development Centre's lottery-funded Achieving Community Empowerment programme – which works with around 10 community groups per year – and the approach of Development Trusts Association Scotland, provide potential templates for success.<sup>7</sup>

In our December 2011 response to the publication of the Scottish Government's National Regeneration Strategy, SURF was critical of the claim that the £7.9m People and Communities Fund represented a valuable new resource to support community organisations to grow and strengthen. We highlighted the fact that this sum actually represented a substantial reduction in dedicated community focused regeneration investment in Scotland.

The available People and Communities Fund is actually £6m per annum, and presents a thinner spreading, across all types of community anchor organisations, of the previous £12m Wider Role Fund for Housing Associations. This 50% cut is widely observed as part of an abandonment of direct investment in local community regeneration.

The most stark element of that frustrating picture for those involved in trying to resource local community activity, is the absorption of the previously ring-fenced £148m Community Regeneration Fund into the general budgets of hard-pressed local authorities. In most cases it has not re-emerged at the local level in local community planning spending priorities.

### **Shared Capacity**

SURF is currently participating in policy discussion sessions with the Scottish Government's Regeneration Unit as it develops plans for the 2013/14 Community Capacity Building Programme.

One of the broader points SURF is making in that welcome discussion is the necessity of addressing the substantial challenge of building capacity within other partner bodies to enable them to engage effectively with the vital information and activity assets that community and voluntary organisations hold.

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<sup>7</sup> *Achieving Community Empowerment (ACE)*. Scottish Community Development Centre website. Available online at: <http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/achieving-community-empowerment/>

## 2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

**Question:** *“How can the outcomes of regeneration truly be captured and measured? What are the barriers to capturing outcomes and how should the success of regeneration investment be determined?”*

As stated in section 1.2, SURF identifies the improved wellbeing of local residents as the most important outcome of community regeneration processes. We feel that this central element often lacks prominence, or is overlooked altogether, in the monitoring and evaluation of regeneration projects large and small.

One effective tool for tracking changes in a local population’s health and wellbeing prior to and following a regeneration process is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). This internationally respected tool is based on a simple 14-question survey that asks interviewees to agree or disagree on a sliding scale with statements about their wellbeing in the last two weeks. A typical statement is, “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future.”<sup>8</sup>

WEMWBS is used by the GoWell project, an ambitious research initiative that tracks the long-term health and wellbeing impacts of regeneration investments in Glasgow. Interim GoWell findings indicate that improvements in such areas as social housing, the provision of green spaces and the quality of the public realm lead to significant advances in the health and wellbeing of residents of the city’s disadvantaged communities.<sup>9</sup>

SURF takes a strong interest in monitoring and evaluation in regeneration. We are formally participating in the Scottish Government’s National Regeneration Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Stakeholder Group and has fed into CoSLA’s National Oversight Committee for Community Planning.

### **Conclusion – Back to the Tools**

In its formal response to the launch of the December 2011 Scottish Government National Regeneration Strategy, ‘Achieving a Sustainable Future’, SURF offered comment on the likely impact of the £6m People and Communities Fund and the introduction of the £50m SPRUCE investment stream.

These were presented in the strategy as significant investments in supporting community led regeneration and physical/economic developments respectively. Significant though they may be, as a proportion of the sharply reduced Scottish Government regeneration budget they are so small as to be almost insignificant in the context of the daunting challenges at hand and the clearly identifiable ones ahead.

How the Scottish Government links and applies the much greater resources it has for public service procurement (£9bn) and infrastructure investment (£17bn in the five years since April 2007), and the leadership role it sets for Local Authorities in the application of those

<sup>8</sup> *The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale*. NHS Health Scotland, 2006. Available online at: <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/1467.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> *GoWell Online*. Official website of the GoWell research and learning programme: <http://www.gowellonline.com/>



investments at a local level, will have a far greater impact on the success of the regeneration strategy in addressing poverty and inequalities in disadvantaged areas than any and all of the much more limited regeneration support budgets specified in the strategy.

SURF shares the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's interest in the prospects for enhancing community led regeneration, but urges it to give greater consideration to how the much more substantial tools at hand in the form of health, education, housing, procurement, and infrastructure policy and resources might be linked and brought to bear on the overarching aim of creating a fairer and flourishing Scotland for all to have the opportunity to enjoy and contribute to.

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*[End of inquiry response]*

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