Exploring an 'Alliance for Action' for Rothesay

A SURF Feasibility Study for Highlands & Islands Enterprise

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This paper was produced by SURF, Scotland's independent regeneration network, for Highlands & Islands Enterprise and in cooperation with Argyll & Bute Council.

Its purpose is to summarise the process and findings of a 2014 feasibility study, led by SURF Chair Brian MacDonald, into the potential for successfully and productively developing a SURF 'Alliance for Action' regeneration initiative, focused on the town of Rothesay.

ABOUT SURF'S ALLIANCE FOR ACTION

In early 2013, with support from the Scottish Government, SURF established its cross-sector and collaborative 'Alliance for Action' programme in two usefully comparative case study places of Govan, Glasgow, and east Kirkcaldy, Fife. The agreed aim was to explore the scope for the most productive relationship between local circumstances, knowledge & assets and national regeneration agencies, policies & resources.

The programme's dual purpose is:

- to further strengthen resilience and practical outcomes in the two communities;

- to enhance wider policy and resource considerations for supporting community regeneration in the continuing recessionary context.

Further information, including a December 2014 interim report on activity, learning outcomes and further plans, is available on the SURF website:

www.scotregen.co.uk/alliance-for-action/

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1.   Executive Summary: Rothesay Feasibility Study

1.01 Background & Themes

This summary is based on an extended and diverse dialogue with a range of relevant groups and individuals identified principally by Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Argyll & Bute Council. Those conversations included direct engagement through:

- Argyll & Bute Council's Senior Management Team
- Argyll & Bute Council's Bute & Cowal Area Committee
- Meetings with:
  - Officers of Argyll & Bute Council
  - Community based Individuals
  - Significant Local Business Leaders
  - Third Sector Organisations
- A programme of telephone interviews
- Responses from individuals based on an invitation placed in the 'Buteman' newspaper

The above list does not purport to be comprehensive.

These discussions, and the broader study process, identified three main emergent themes:

1.   **Place**
2.   **People**
3.   **Process**

1.02 Place

The town of Rothesay has tremendous assets. Its functioning is, however, affected by:

- The town's general appearance. This is recognised to be improving, but there appears to be no present clear strategy for how best to consolidate the enhancements made to date and for further progress;
- Issues of ownership of properties and resultant restrictions to achieving shared improvements for the whole town;
- The overhang of redundant but listed buildings. How many can the town sustain? What is the viable future for these buildings? Should they/can they all be retained?;
- The lack of a modern hotel;
- The cost of reaching the town from the mainland. The ferry fares were almost universally described as a barrier to growth;
- Planning policies are not felt to be sufficiently supportive of aspirations for developments in the town centre.

1.03 People

Rothesay has a significant civic life, but despite there being a large number of voluntary and community groups, there are concerns about:

- **Capacity**

  o Many of those spoken to said that all of those who were likely to be interested and active were already busy doing other things;

  o There were concerns that there may presently be a lack of sufficient knowledge and skills to adequately enhance capacity;

  o Although there have been previous attempts at a coordinated approach to the generally agreed main issues affecting Rothesay, there was an almost universal view that people would support a further, arguably different, approach;

- **Focus**

  o There was acknowledgement that no one group has the specific remit for the development of Rothesay town centre;

  o There was no clearly stated vision for the town and its future, which people/groups could understand and get actively involved in supporting;

  o There was no identifiable unique selling point for Rothesay beyond tourism – and an acknowledgement that tourism was not presently achieving its full potential.

1.04 Process

Rothesay has a number of issues that need to be tackled. Bute, despite being an island, is managed (it is said) remotely. From the perspective of Argyll & Bute Council, it is part of Bute & Cowal Area Committee. In Community Planning terms, it is part of Bute & Cowal Community Planning Local Group. As a result, there appears to be no dedicated focus on Rothesay. Furthermore:

- Planning policies were seen as being designed for 'somewhere else', and took no real account of specific Rothesay context;
- Consultees were clear about the need for progressive, inclusive, and effective leadership, but few views were expressed as to who should be leading;
- There was a perceived lack of coordination. There appeared to be no relationship between the various investments in the town which, in themselves, were recognised as significant. Paradoxically, they were felt not to have much impact on the functioning of the town;
- There is no Master Plan or overarching Action Plan for the town besides the major investment in the Townscape Heritage Initiative and the Rothesay Pavilion Project;
- The latent catalyst role of the Pavilion Project is not yet fully realised.

There was a general view that an external facilitator might help address these issues.

1.05 Potential

Despite the issues raised, as listed above, there is clear potential for change in Rothesay, and a wider policy framework that could support such change.

Rothesay benefits from a strong community spirit reflected in the way in which most individuals were prepared to positively consider the value of an Alliance approach.

The assets of Rothesay are considerable. The environment, both natural and built, remains significant. The general quality of life is held in high regard.

1.06 Conclusions

Rothesay is a location that would benefit from a holistic approach to town centre development as part of regeneration initiative that seeks to maximise opportunities for community participation.

Specifically, Rothesay would benefit if the Community Planning partners could be persuaded to approach the Scottish Government with a view to obtaining a special status for Rothesay on the basis of the well-documented issues affecting the town. In seeking to align with the Scottish Government-supported 'Town Centre First' principle, relevant partnership activity focused on Rothesay might include:

1. Architecture + Design Scotland
   a. Place-based reviews
   b. Stalled Spaces Fund

2. Argyll & Bute Council
   a. Town Centre Investment Zone
   b. Simplified Planning Zone
   c. Town Centre Planning zone

3. Scottish Government
   a. Charrettes Fund (currently allocated for this year) to support active and coordinated community engagement in envisioning and planning
   b. Small Business Bonus Scheme
   c. Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme

2.   The Study: Objectives and Programme

2.01 Context

SURF was commissioned by Highlands & Islands Enterprise to carry out a feasibility study into establishing whether there is interest and value in Rothesay in pursuing an 'Alliance for Action' based on existing SURF activities in Glasgow and Fife.

SURF's Alliance for Action is a collaborative activity and shared learning programme that SURF is presently coordinating in the two case study areas of Govan, Glasgow, and east Kirkcaldy, Fife.

In both of these disadvantaged 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 more coordinated and holistic regeneration activity;
- Draw out transferable learning towards more successful and sustainable policy and practice in community regeneration.

SURF's Alliance for Action programme is being delivered over 2013–16 with support from the Scottish Government.

SURF's collaborative approach is based on seeking medium- and long-term sustainable solutions that engage national and local assets and people, enhancing the opportunities and outcomes for all involved; as opposed to the more conventional regeneration focus on narrow, short-term development solutions.

The 'Alliance for Action' philosophy is based on an informed belief that:

- Regeneration is a long-term challenge, which requires long-term rather than short-term commitment;
- There is a need to protect marginal places and projects in challenging times;
- There is a need to recognise the crucial significance of public sector assets, action and resources;
- There is a need for increased partnership working in order to:
  o make greater use of public sector powers and assets to maximise regeneration opportunities;
  o minimise the degenerative impact of of public sector revenue and capital programme cuts;
  o avoid valuable development investments being resticted to 'silo' based approaches.
- Community groups can be supported to grow and become catalysts for more effective and sustainable local regeneration.

2.02 Initial Approach

In pursuing the approach for this study, SURF originally proposed the following methodology:

Stage 1 – Project Scoping

- Work planning
- Information gathering
- Rothesay engagement

Featuring:

  o Meetings with Highlands & Islands Enterprise to identify key tasks, stakeholders and influencers;
  o Meetings with Argyll & Bute Council to determine interest in, and appetite for, the project;
  o Meetings with Argyll & Bute Council Elected Members;
  o Meetings with community groups;
  o A senior stakeholder level workshop to identify the various opportunities for developing an Alliance for Action approach in Rothesay.

Stage 2: Research

- Identifying options for a new approach

Including a review of:

  o Highlands & Islands Enterprise reports on Rothesay;
  o Argyll & Bute Council reports on Rothesay;
  o Rothesay Townscape Heritage Initiative reports;
  o Other relevant reports as identified by Highlands & Islands Enterprise;
  o Extant and proposed project bids;
  o Mainstream budgets.

Stage 3: Developing Alliance Options / Solutions

- Analysing options

Specifically, meeting with Highlands & Islands Enterprise colleagues to:

- o Report on viability and opportunities, identifying:
  - ▪ Interest in the Alliance for Action model;
  - ▪ Issues and options.
- o Identify methods of taking forward developments;
- o Identify potential barriers;
- o Develop an implementation plan.

Stage 4: Report and Recommendations

- Testing options with potential users

Including:

- o Clarifying deliverability;
- o Evaluating potential users' views;
- o Meetings with stakeholders on Rothesay to discuss findings.

Stage 5: Completion

- Ensuring that the proposals are embedded

SURF aims to achieve consensus from key stakeholders on the implementation plan. Strategic goals and key performance indicators would be developed and a process established for delivering an Alliance for Action strategy. As part of this work, key recommendations could be made on integrating the new strategy with existing Argyll & Bute Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and partner agency strategies, including the Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement; as well as addressing the ongoing leadership of both the strategy and implementation plan.

2.03 Process of Feasibility Study

In broad terms, the outline detailed above has been achieved, although perhaps not in the sequence identified in the early proposals. It has not proven possible to have a senior stakeholder workshop as planned, although all of the suggested senior stakeholders were contacted, and individual meetings arranged with the vast majority. It is also the case that phase three and four of the proposal have been conjoined in an attempt to make up for some time lost earlier in the process.

Following a very helpful meeting with the Senior Management Team at Argyll & Bute Council, the Council's support for the feasibility process was established. At this stage, the Council identified two senior officials to assist in the process:

- Fergus Murray as our senior level contact;
- Peter MacDonald as our Rothesay contact.

Through these colleagues, we were able to arrange meetings within the Council and its Bute & Cowal Area Committee, and with extensive contacts at the local level in Rothesay. Our thanks are due to these individuals for their support and for their efforts on our behalf.

Likewise, through Kerrien Grant at Highlands & Islands Enterprise we were able to access agency staff and reports, and were pointed towards local businesses, whose support was very welcome.

The process has involved face-to-face interviews with over 20 individuals drawn from the Community Council, the third sector, local SMEs, major employers, members of the Community Planning Partnership and officials of both Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Argyll & Bute Council.

In addition to this, there have been several telephone interviews and, interestingly, a series of six submissions made by email following an article in the local Buteman newspaper. All of these submissions have been detailed and well-thought through, and are a helpful contribution to the process as a snapshot of the views of significant individuals in the community.

SURF would like to record its thanks to all of those who contributed by whatever method.

2.04 Central Questions

SURF approached this commission from Highlands & Islands Enterprise by asking the following questions:

- What is the best way to collectively improve the social, economic and physical environment in Rothesay?

- Can Rothesay mobilise local knowledge, skills and enthusiasm into a coherent approach to regeneration?

- Can the special character and heritage of Rothesay be protected in a manner consistent with efforts to modernise its economic functioning and deliver sustainable economic growth?

- Can the Rothesay 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 Rothesay 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 Rothesay?

3.   Rothesay: Trends, Drivers, Conditions, Prospects

3.01 The Local Economy

Prior to embarking work on Rothesay, it is necessary to put the economic functioning of Rothesay in context. The following table shows the position of Rothesay in comparison with the rest of Scotland:

Comparator	Rothesay	Scotland
Population Change 2001-2011	**-9.2%**	**+4.6%**
Population over 65	**25.2%**	**16.8%**
Economically Active	**62.2%**	**69%**
Part Time Employees	**25.9%**	**19.3%**
Claimant Count	**6.8%**	**3.7%**
JSA Claimants (m) 16-24	**10.3%**	**5.4%**
JSA Claimants (m) 25-64	**5.6%**	**3.3%**
Out of Work Benefits (working age population)	**20.4%**	**12.9%**

Source: Rothesay Profile, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (May 2014)

Additional significant statistics for Rothesay as compared to Scotland as a whole are:

- A higher share of employment in transport, storage, accommodation, food services, administrative and support services, and health and social work;
- A higher share of employment in managers, directors and senior officials, caring, leisure and other services, and sales & customer services occupations;
- A larger proportion of the adult population with no qualifications, and a smaller proportion with degree-level qualifications.

These figures suggest that there are substantial issues to be addressed. Whilst all of the figures are significant, there is, perhaps, one that stands out in particular. At a time when the population of Scotland rose by almost 5%, the population of Rothesay declined by over 9%.

The issues of the small towns in the west of Scotland were recognised by the Scottish Government some time ago:

> *"A decade from now, if present trends continue, Glasgow will (at least proportionately) no longer be Scotland's great urban problem; rather it will be the small towns of the west...there is a wide arc of towns that will be losing some of their economic base, but will be unable to compete with thriving service growth at the core of the city-region"*

> *"We need a new vision for these towns set in the context of their city-region to deal with these emergent issues"*

Source: Review of Scotland's Cities: The Analysis, Scottish Executive (2002)

As illustrated in the table overleaf, the Argyll & Bute Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement recognises the issues detailed above and contain a number of targets for dealing with them over the next ten years.

There may be scope to integrate Alliance for Action activities into these existing strategies.

Outcome	10 year aspiration	Progress to be made in 3 years
1) In Argyll and Bute the Economy is thriving	Regeneration activity in Dunoon and Rothesay has transformed them into thriving local economies	A clear strategic and holistic focus on the Regeneration challenges in Dunoon and Rothesay will begin to show positive results and opportunities through improved connectivity being realized, increasing activity in the housing market and inward investment success
6) people live in safer stronger communities	Our town centres are thriving and vibrant. Regeneration of the built environment enhances the competitiveness of Argyll and Bute	Communities and public sector partners work collaboratively to make the best use of our natural and built environment and our culture and heritage with clear plans for development in place and investment underway

Source: Argyll & Bute Community Plan & Single Outcome Agreement 2013-23, Argyll & Bute Council

3.02 Key Local Issues

The feasibility study process has involved face-to-face interviews with over 20 individuals drawn from the Community Council, the third sector, local SMEs, major employers, members of the Community Planning Partnership, and officials of both Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Argyll & Bute Council.

In addition to having an open conversation, the interviews sought to identify the five or six key issues affecting Rothesay most commonly identified by respondents. In broad terms, there was agreement amongst all the respondents that these issues were as follows:

3.02(a) Place

Rothesay has tremendous assets. The functioning of the town is, however, affected by:

- The look of the town:

    i. The town's general appearance. This is recognised to be improving, but there appears to be no clear strategy for how best to consolidate the enhancements made to date and for further progress;

    ii. The absence of a Master Plan or Action Plan for the town is perceived as a barrier to community participation in making improvements to the town centre; there appears to be no document or strategy which can be agreed upon;

    iii. Developments at the Rothesay Pavilion were welcomed, but there is an agreed perception that, properly managed, the development of the Pavilion could be a major catalyst for the regeneration of the town if it is integrated effectively within a wider plan.

- Issues of ownership of properties and the ability of the town to make improvements:

    i. The Council's role in the Townscape Heritage Initiative, the Winter Gardens and other significant schemes was recognised and welcomed;

    ii. There is, however, a concern that some owners may not wish or be able to take part in improvement schemes and that their inability to do so may hold back efforts to improve the town centre;

iii. There is recognition that there may not be any effectual solutions to this issue other than finding new sources of external funding.

- Overhang of redundant listed buildings:

    i. It was perceived that the town appears to have a significant number of buildings that may not be suitable for reuse, and which may represent a blight on the town and a drain on resources. Notwithstanding the fact that some of these buildings were listed, it was felt that the town should strive to form a view, in conjunction with relevant statutory bodies, on whether all these buildings should be kept.

- Lack of a modern hotel:

    i. Insofar as tourism was concerned, the lack of a significant modern hotel was cited as a major barrier to tourism. The example often cited was that of the Auchrannie on Arran. This model was perceived to meet the criteria that most respondents discussed, that of providing high quality accommodation allied to significant wet weather activities;

    ii. Other barriers to tourism were described as:

        o The lack of a collectively defined and agreed specific unique selling point for tourism in Rothesay;
        o The lack of a sufficiently joined-up approach to tourism on the part of the public sector;
        o A tourism approach that is, to a large degree, backward-looking and nostalgic;
        o Some unhelpful conditions and restrictions surrounding the tourism industry and hindering local entrepreneurialism.

- The challenge of getting to Rothesay from the mainland:

    i. The ferry fares were almost universally described as a barrier to growth;
    ii. It was recognised that the implementation of the Road Equivalent Tariff in the autumn of 2015 would help, but there was frustration that Bute had been left trailing behind Arran – which was seen as a competitor – in this.
    iii. In addition to the issue of cost, the reliability of the ferry service, particularly in the winter, was seen as an issue that made it difficult for people to commute from the island – this might also be contributing to outward migration.

3.02(b)   People

Rothesay has a significant civic life, but despite there being a large number of voluntary and community groups, there are concerns about:

- Capacity:

    i. Many of those spoken to said that all of those who were likely to be interested were busy doing other things:

- o Almost all of those interviewed were heavily involved in their own company, group business or employment;
- o There was a view that, if individuals generally were to be engaged beyond their current involvement, then there would need to be support for them to do so;
- o There was an acknowledgement that the same people tend to get involved in community activities, and that there would be merit in trying to engage with those who did not normally get involved.

ii. There were concerns that there may presently be a lack of knowledge and skills required to adequately enhance capacity:

- o There was a general acceptance that, notwithstanding the fact that many people have significant experience in their own profession or group, there was nonetheless a need for some form of capacity building;

- o There was also a perceived need for those involved in the public sector to develop their skills in working with communities over the long-term, and to be genuinely led by the community.

iii. Despite previous attempts at a coordinated approach to the issues affecting Rothesay, there was an almost universal view that people would support another approach to the issues:

- o Many of the respondents were able to point to previous example of attempts that failed;
- o It was suggested that some of these efforts failed because they lacked broad enough support, were not embedded in the community, or were not followed through;
- o Any new approach would need to have broad support from, and be founded on, Rothesay.

iv. There was a view that an external facilitator might help address issues:

- o Several respondents took the view that, in light of the above, the process of developing a new strategy for Rothesay would benefit from objective and informed external facilitation;
- o Such facilitation might also include the day-to-day support, in the first instance, of a specially created Rothesay-focused group.

- Focus:

    i. There was an acknowledgement that no single group presently has the specific remit to develop Rothesay town centre:

    - o There are a total of 77 groups on the Island of Bute, according to Highlands & Islands Enterprise's Isle of Bute Local Community Audit (2011);
    - o Despite this significant level of community engagement, there is no group focused on Rothesay itself;

o Almost all of the respondents thought that a group – a community led alliance focused on the town in a holistic way – was necessary to deliver any meaningful change in Rothesay.

ii. There was no clear vision for the town and its future, which people could understand and get behind:

   o One of the most significant issues was that there was no cohesive clear vision for Rothesay;
   o It was generally agreed that in the absence of such a shared vision, a variety of projects and strategies may be pursued in isolation and potentially in contradiction of each other;
   o Notwithstanding the significant endeavours of groups such as Fyne Futures and the Pavilion Project, it was felt that more could be collectively achieved for all if there was a sufficiently shared vision for the town.

iii. There was no identifiable unique selling point for Rothesay beyond tourism – and an acknowledgement that tourism was not achieving as much as it could:

   o The issue of the tourism market, and Rothesay's response to it, has been mentioned elsewhere. There was a view, however, that:

      a. Rothesay did not have a clear idea of what market it wanted to be in;
      b. Despite the significant and obvious assets possessed by Rothesay, the collective potential was not being identified and exploited;
      c. The agencies responsible for supporting and promoting tourism did not appear, to the respondents, to have a coordinated response;
      d. Rothesay's image was perceived to be old-fashioned and outdated, with little to offer in a modern tourism market.
      e. Beyond tourism, the respondents felt that little had been done to explore what place Rothesay has in a modern Scotland, the agenda of which is increasingly been driven by cities;
      f. There is scope for engaging the community in the process of defining a new future for Rothesay.

3.02(c) Present Process

Rothesay has a number of issues that need to be tackled. Bute, despite being an island with specific needs, is managed (it is said) remotely.

From the perspective of Argyll & Bute Council, it is part of Bute & Cowal Area Committee. For Highlands and Islands Enterprise and NHS Highland, it is managed from Lochgilphead. In Community Planning terms, it is part of Bute & Cowal Community Planning Local Group.

As a result, there appears to be no dedicated focus on Rothesay. Most of the respondents held the view that Bute, and therefore Rothesay, did not have the priority within the public bodies that its circumstances demanded. In exploring this further, there was broad agreement that:

- There are issues of leadership. Consultees were clear about the importance of appropriate and effective leadership, but few views were expressed as to who should be leading, although there were a number of views as to who should not be leading:

    i. Some took the view that the legitimate leadership role should lie with Argyll & Bute Council. It was not, however, clear how this might be achieved with three elected members on Bute;
    ii. In addition, it was acknowledged that as the existing members were understood to be standing down at the next election, there may be problems in pursuing this preferred direction;
    iii. In terms of identifying an individual from the community, there were some recognised concerns:

        o Would the individual have adequate backing of the community?
        o What process would be used to identify the individual?
        o Would the individual have sufficient support to pursue the task?

    iv. It was broadly agreed that, with the right kind of support, an individual on the island or with Rothesay connections that had sufficient experience could potentially be identified.

- There was a perceived lack of adequate coordination:

    i. There appeared to be no coordinated relationship between the present various investments in the town which, in themselves, were recognised as significant. Paradoxically, these investments were not seen to have much impact on the functioning of the town;
    ii. It was broadly acknowledged that the investment by Argyll & Bute Council and its partners had, over time, been substantial. The major issue raised by the respondents was that notwithstanding these efforts, there appeared to be little connection between them as far as could be ascertained by members of the community;
    iii. There remains much to be done in the town, but no sufficiently clear method by which the community might influence the choice of priorities.

- There is no Master Plan or Action Plan for the town, notwithstanding the major investment in the Townscape Heritage Initiative and the Pavilion:

    i. The absence of a plan is felt to be a significant issue;
    ii. This gave the impression that investments are made in a haphazard way.

- The catalyst role of the Pavilion Project is not yet seen as maximising its potential:

    i. The funding package for the Pavilion continues to develop. The date for the conclusion of the Pavilion project appears set. Once confirmed, it could act as a significant catalyst for other activities, including creative cultural events that could be scheduled in the run up to the opening.

- Respondents generally perceived that planning policies felt as though they were designed for somewhere else and took insufficient account of specific Rothesay issues.

4. Vision for the Future

4.01 Community Led Design

Almost all of the consultees agreed with the proposition that Rothesay requires a shared vision for its future. It is axiomatic that the wider community should be meaningfully involved in the development of that vision.

In the absence of the community having been invited or enabled to define that vision, it is not appropriate here to state what it should be. It is nonetheless reasonable to describe what that vision might need to take account of and which strategies might be appropriate.

In the absence of a common, agreed vision, everyone and or each group is left to their own devices to imagine one. Such a scenario will undoubtedly result in unmanageable and unfocused efforts, with everyone believing that what they are doing is right.

A sufficient common understanding of the vision allows all stakeholders to more usefully align their own improvement efforts to greater mutual benefit. It is the absence of a shared vision that was commented on by most of the consultees. Many of them also discussed the danger of establishing a vision predicated on the issues that are significant to just one group.

"There are numerous examples of physical urban regeneration which have failed to improve wellbeing... because local people were not also part of the journey.

"Community-led design is a design process that recognises the value of engaging and involving in the transformation process and which places people at the heart of the decision-making process. In community-led design, the involvement of citizens goes beyond consultation; local people are actively involved in every stage from vision setting to implementation, while professionals such as architects and planners take on new roles as facilitators and enablers rather than directors and managers."

Source: Places Love People, Carnegie UK Trust (2014)

4.02 Contextual Development

In the absence of a clearly defined shared vision, it is likely that the mistakes and false starts of the past will be recreated. To avoid that scenario, one of the early tasks would be the creation of a vision for Rothesay, with the community having a major role in the development of that vision.

To develop this vision, any new strategy for the town should be considered in terms of Rothesay past, present and future:

- Historic Rothesay – reinterpreting the town's rich history and the built heritage, and analysing the legacy of previous planning and learning lessons from the past;
- Today's Rothesay – recognising the town's strengths and weaknesses;
- Future Rothesay – regenerating the town through an inspirational, holistic and realistic vision that encourages a socially inclusive, environmentally and economically sustainable place.

5.   Framing a Transformational Strategy

5.01 Strategic Themes

Notwithstanding the fact that Rothesay has yet to establish a shared vision, a series of strategic themes have emerged through the consultations. These could form the basis of work towards a shared vision. They are:

5.01(a)   Rothesay's Built Environment

  i. Built form: place-mending;
  ii. Building on a sense of place;
  iii. Reuse of redundant buildings;
  iv. Increased public use of space;
  v. Development of live/work and mixed-use spaces.

It is generally accepted that the most successful public spaces are those that community play a role in developing and shaping and that offer continued opportunities for participation.

5.01(b)   Redefining Rothesay: A Distinctive Town for Residents and Visitors

  i. Culture is key to our sense of identity as individuals in our communities;
  ii. Cultural factors encourage visitors and locals to visit towns, and culture is a significant component of growing town economies;
  iii. Meeting and gathering spaces, sense of history and progress, area identity and imagery all contribute to distinctiveness.

Research suggests that the 'softer aspects' of a town centre – opportunities for social interaction, leisure activities, atmosphere, events, outdoor markets and the availability of green spaces – have a significant impact on where people choose to shop.

5.01(c)   Rothesay: Driving Enterprise and Innovation

  i.   Supporting existing business;
  ii. Investing in business infrastructure;
  iii. Enterprise and start-ups;
  iv. Skills.

5.01(d)   Reactivating Rothesay: Promoting an Active, Healthy Community

In their report on *Resilience and Public Health* (2014), the Glasgow Centre for Population Health argues that 'social infrastructure' – the physical structures that allow communities to come together, network and build relationships (social capital) – are critical to "enabl[ing] people to improve the quality of their lives."

This is because they support the development of so-called 'resilient communities' – communities with the ability to 'bounce-back' and adapt successfully to economic, social and environmental change, uncertainty and adversity.

In broad terms, the strategic themes outlined in this section reflect the findings of an earlier study conducted for Highlands & Islands Enterprise, which sought residents' views on the most significant issues for Rothesay:

Issue	Rothesay %
Improve appearance of town centre	83%
Facilities for young people	61%
Support for Small Businesses	52%
Tourism Initiatives & Island Marketing	45%
Recreation Facilities	38%
Training and Skills Development	35%
Quality Accommodation and eateries	30%
Access to quality local foods	20%
Natural, Cultural and heritage issues	11%

Source: Bute Community Survey, Snedden Economics (2011)

5.02 Town Centre Strategy

There are many examples of transformational strategies, which are highlighted and promoted by many organisations, including the Scottish Government. It has in the recent past promoted 'renaissance towns' as one method of encouraging town centre regeneration:

- Renaissance Towns, Learning Point 69 (2010)

    o This Learning Point was developed from an event held in February 2010 to explore the Renaissance Towns approach to regeneration. This approach focuses on re-imagining what a town will be like in the future and is focused, in part, on setting a long-term vision. It recognises that the community should be involved in the regeneration process from the outset, that there should be shared decision-making, and that the approach should take a holistic whole-town approach. Options derived from this approach include:

        i. A 'Town Team' cross-cutting group of citizens, stakeholders and decision makers;
        ii. Open planning 'Charrette' events, involving the whole community and drawing in expert help:
        iii. A 'Town Charter', a mandate for the town that can be adopted by the Local

        iv. Authority as supplementary planning advice.

"Approaches such as this are required to build consensus across the three major stakeholder groups, community, private sector and public sector, and encourage participants to get involved in the process early. These approaches could benefit by taking regeneration out of 'mainstream' public sector activity and making it an activity for the whole town to be involved in. The establishment of a strategic plan supported by the local community and a range

of stakeholders may provide a lasting mandate as the local political landscape changes over time."

Source: Renaissance Towns, Scottish Government (2010)

Other examples are covered in the Scottish Government's Town Centre Action Plan 'One Year On' Progress Report (2014):

- o The 'Can Do Towns' innovation challenge process is aimed at unlocking the potential of towns;
- o 15 towns have taken part in the challenge so far, with opportunities for others to take part in the future;
- o The Action Plan contains a number of 'Demonstration Projects' that potentially have applicability for Rothesay.

"Scotland's town centres are full of amazing people and amazing places and this is a chance to look at both differently. There has never been a better time or opportunity to bring your entrepreneurial vision to your town centre.

"This initiative is, through exposing participants to inspirational examples of success and innovative ways of thinking, enabling the development of viable local entrepreneurial ecosystems. At the local level public, private and third sector alliances are being fostered in order to create vibrant and thriving town centre economies"

Source: Town Centre Action Plan - One Year On Progress Report, Scottish Government (2014)

Some relevant town centre regeneration policy and practice elements:

- o Town Centre First Principle
- o Town Centre Data
- o Town Centre Housing Fund
- o Town Centre Investment Zones
- o Simplifying the Planning Process
- o Town Centre Digital Demonstration Project
- o Town Centre Asset Audits
- o Town Centre Charettes
- o Town Centre Masterplanning Toolkit
- o Stalled Spaces Demonstration Project (Argyll & Bute Council has successfully bid for this resource)
- o Town Centre Entrepreneurial Initiative: Can Do Towns

Source: Town Centre Action Plan - One Year On Progress Report, Scottish Government (2014)

6.   Reviewing an Alliance for Action: Role and Prospects

6.01 Rationale for an Alliance for Action for Rothesay

SURF's Alliance for Action activity in Govan and east Kirkcaldy has already produced significant benefits in enhanced practical cooperation and coordination of investments in the two case study communities, which are facing multiple social and economic challenges similar to those in Rothesay.

There has been enthusiastic participation in the Alliance for Action approach, which substantiates a generally increased level of consensus on the wisdom of collaboration for achieving added value on shared aims. This is built on a now widely ingrained orthodoxy of partnership processes, which has been actively promoted in advice, legislation and practice by the Scottish Government in recent decades.

Significant added value in partnership activity is achievable via the role of a generally respected 'no axe to grind' network like SURF, which can take responsibility for supporting a coordinated and focused approach to collaborative place-based regeneration. Investors and policy-makers appear to appreciate the opportunity to engage with the reality of a local regeneration context in a 'safe' coordinated collaboration.

Funders appear to take reassurance from the shared commitment and responsibility of other investors. Policy-makers welcome a broader understating of the local dynamics that affect the viability and interaction of their approach. Many local players are encouraged by the level and broad spectrum of interested parties engaged via the Alliance for Action process. That breadth more accurately reflects their view of the extent and interactivity of local regeneration challenges. For most communities, it stands in favourable contrast to the conventional connections between individual funders, policy-makers, places and specific projects.

Under the shared Alliance for Action focus, there have been instances of improved investment efficiency and cooperative operating climate through the diplomatic re-engagement of some historically disconnected local projects and personalities. Similarly, there have been useful examples where debilitating misunderstandings and shortcomings around effective representation and accountability have been addressed.

While resistance to anything more adventurous than the most conventional bureaucratic processes remains high amongst some organisations, there does appear to be a greater level of appreciation of the productive potential of artistically creative approaches. Support for more creativity as a medium for community engagement and within organisational culture has been evidenced in Alliance for Action activities in both sites and via national policy developments.

SURF's experience is that advantages for all parties of a diplomatic and catalytic role (such as that of SURF's in the Alliance for Action) raises the question of how such a function might be replicated to achieve greater levels of constructive collaboration and mutually beneficial investments in other areas.

Rothesay has several factors which suggest that an Alliance for Action could work:

6.01(a)   A Supportive Community

From the community's perspective, within Rothesay there is a high level of consensus on the issues facing the town and, from those consulted, an agreement that there could be much to be gained from approaching the issues on the basis an Alliance for Action or something analogous to that.

The significant level of community participation on the island of Bute and in Rothesay can be considered a major asset in terms of approaching an Alliance for Action. In all of the discussions, there was a general new that Rothesay could come together to support the changes necessary regarding the efficient functioning of its town.

The resilience of the community is one of Rothesay's major assets. Nonetheless, it was recognised that to be as effective as possible in this approach, the community would need adequate and appropriate support both in terms of capacity building and external facilitation. The role of external facilitation was raised by several of those who were consulted.

SURF's experience in both east Kirkcaldy and Govan is that the experience of a trusted organisation with experience in facilitation and was regeneration was essential in:

- Bringing together disparate voluntary and community groups;
- Bringing public and private sector bodies into constructive dialogue;
- Liaising with and mobilising the support and resources of national organisations;
- Providing support and information to those in leadership roles.

6.01(b)   A Supportive Local Policy Framework

The Community Planning Partnership has identified the major issues and has set targets for their resolution through the Single Outcome Agreement.

This significant focus on the regeneration of Rothesay in the Single Outcome Agreement is a fundamental supporting policy statement in terms of seeking to engage with the Community Planning partners.

In addition to prefacing the issues in the Community Plan, Argyll & Bute Council has also specifically recognised the issue of depopulation at its recent population summit in Dunoon.

On top of the significant capital resources allocated in the recent past, Argyll & Bute Council has allocated other resources to Bute. A Community Development Worker allocated to Bute & Cowal is due to take up post soon. The Council is also considering adopting a 'Team Town' approach to Rothesay.

As part of the process of managing its property portfolio, the Council is looking at the process of rationalising its property assets against the background of the 'Town Centre First' principle.

The Council acknowledges that there is a need for a holistic, joined-up approach to communities and that capacity has to be developed to facilitate this within the Council, the Community Planning Partnership, and the community.

6.01(c)   A Supportive National Policy Framework

The Scottish Government has a number of policies that adopt a place-based approach to regeneration.

The Scottish Government's Town Centre Action Plan contains policy initiatives and strategies designed to encourage town centre regeneration across the country. Many of these policies and initiatives need to be pursued in concert with partners; others are controlled directly by the Scottish Government and its agencies.

Rothesay has benefited from Scottish Government investment in this area, most recently through the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund allocation to the Pavilion Project.

Many of the specific initiatives in the Town Centre Action Plan could have applicability to Rothesay in their own right but, perhaps more importantly, also provide a way of ensuring that initiatives such as the Pavilion Project and Argyll & Bute Council's recent capital investments can have a more catalytic effect.

6.02 Analysis

Taken together, the three pillars of support – the community, the Community Planning Partnership, and the supportive national policy environment – suggest that a SURF Alliance for Action could be successfully introduced on Rothesay.

7.   Conclusions and Recommendations

7.01 Conclusions

This report has, of necessity, focused largely on the challenges facing Rothesay. It is, however, important to note that Rothesay has tremendous assets. That fact is of great significance to any project that seeks to bring about positive, lasting change on Rothesay.

Significant among these are the people themselves and their commitment to their island and town, the environmental assets, the built environment, and the quality of life on the island.

The timing and range of policy initiatives at present which, if made to apply in a coordinated fashion to Rothesay, could make a significant difference to its regeneration prospects.

The SURF Alliance for Action model and experience provides a potentially effective vehicle for identifying, supporting and marshalling these assets and coordinating their collaborative engagement to mutual benefit.

7.02 Recommendations

SURF's recommendations are:

1. An Alliance for Action could and should be initiated on Rothesay;

2. The key tasks should be:

   a. The establishment of a community-based consultative and reference group to inform and develop the Alliance for Action;
   b. Working inclusively with the broad community to identify an individual to take on a leadership role;
   c. Assist in the process of finding appropriate mechanisms for identifying:

      i. A vision for Rothesay;
      ii. A unique selling point for Rothesay.

3. Working with Argyll & Bute Council and Highlands & Islands Enterprise to establish mutually manageable and effective working protocols;

4. Using SURF's networks and connections to engage with the national organisations already working in the existing Alliance for Action sites;

5. Working with the Community Planning Partnership to ensure the Alliance for Action fits and supports their policies, and suggesting changes where appropriate;

6. Engaging with the Scottish Government to source and deliver support into the Alliance for Action process as part of their place-based policy approach.

SURF – Scotland's independent regeneration network

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