

COMMUNITY

SCOTTISH COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACTION PLAN

Celebrating Success: Inspiring Change

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Celebrating Success: Inspiring Change

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CONTENTS

	Page
Ministerial Foreword	2
COSLA Foreword	3
The Community Empowerment Action Plan Introduction	5
Why Community Empowerment is Important	6
What is Community Empowerment?	8
Communities of Interest and Identity	8
Equalities and Diversity	9
How Do Communities Become Empowered?	10
How Community Capacity Building Supports Community Empowerment	11
Roles	13
Evaluating the Impact of Community Empowerment	16
Specific Actions	18
Funding Streams	25
Case Studies	30

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



Trust in the abilities and potential of the Scottish people lies at the core of this Government's philosophy. Our approach to Governing Scotland is underpinned by the belief that the people of this country can, and should, take increased responsibility for the issues that affect our nation. It is through our own people's efforts that we will achieve our shared single purpose of increased sustainable economic growth that will benefit all of Scotland.

It should be no surprise then that we are setting out in this Action Plan our commitment to community empowerment: the process that brings people together from across communities to deliver real and lasting change.

Ensuring we all make the most of the collective talents, creativity and determination of our people is never more important than during tough economic times. By working together our communities become more resilient and confident. These are key qualities in meeting the challenges we all face, and in taking new opportunities as they emerge.

Community Empowerment is a shared enterprise and I am delighted that this plan is being launched jointly with COSLA: another tangible example of the mature and trusting relationship that has developed between National and local Government in Scotland. I am also delighted that the third sector and communities themselves played such a strong role in shaping the plan. As a Government we were determined from the outset that we must listen and respect people's views on what community empowerment meant to them, and how it can be supported. This plan is built on the foundations of what we heard from people from across Scotland.

We are not starting from scratch when it comes to communities doing things for themselves. As a nation, we have a long and proud tradition of people using their energy and talent to make a difference for their fellow Scots. We celebrate here only a few of the hundreds of examples of empowerment that already exist in Scotland, and I congratulate everyone involved in each of them and look forward to hearing about other inspiring stories over the coming years.

The launch of this plan is not an end in itself. Like the process of community empowerment, it has no fixed destination. We are starting on another phase of an exciting journey in Scotland. At times we will no doubt face challenges in seeing more communities becoming more empowered. But, as a Government we don't shy away from challenges, and we are determined to work with all our partners to meet and overcome whatever obstacles appear on the journey.

Alex Neil, MSP, Minister for Housing and Communities

COSLA FOREWORD



As Chair of COSLA's Community Empowerment Task Group I have been encouraged to see the collective enthusiasm around this issue from elected members, the voluntary sector and others on the group.

I hope that this exercise of drafting a high level action plan in partnership with the Scottish Government will be but the beginning of an ongoing developmental process which will enable communities to participate fully in the events and affairs which affect the communities in which they live.

Vibrant and healthy communities need community members who know there are opportunities to engage fully in the decision making processes that have an impact on their lives. We in Local Government cannot compel or require anyone to become empowered, we cannot make it happen, but we can remove barriers, promote better opportunities and support those already involved.

It is my hope that the launch of this plan will provide a platform for raising awareness about the good practice that is already happening across Scotland and about what still stands in the way of empowerment for others.

This action plan is not a stand alone document. Community Empowerment is a cross cutting issue that has the potential to revitalise wider and constructive participation in Scotland's democratic processes and bring new voices into policy and service delivery debates at all levels of government.

Along with this plan COSLA and the Scottish Government have signed a joint statement on Community Learning and Development, outlining how this approach contributes to the achievement of the outcomes councils have signed up to in their Single Outcome Agreements. Community Learning and Development has long been a key part of working with communities at a local level and is inextricably linked with the empowerment agenda.

This plan also ties into the wider commitment by COSLA's Community Wellbeing and Safety Executive Group to address Social Inclusion issues – including opportunities for democratic participation.

COSLA and the Scottish Government have signed up to three joint frameworks that are necessarily linked. These are Equally Well (health inequalities); Achieving Our Potential (tackling poverty); and the Early Years Framework. These three frameworks are all based on a common principle of early intervention. Progressing this approach will be a gradual but determined undertaking to which both levels of government are committed. It will necessitate integrated working between public and private sector partners including the voluntary and third sector. But crucially it must involve, in a real and participatory way the communities themselves. Their voices must be heard and listened to.

I believe that this Community Empowerment Action Plan and the work that will follow in communities across Scotland will provide a basis for engagement with these three strands of work that are so important to improving the quality of life in our communities and the life chances of the next generation.

Harry McGuigan, COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing and Safety



THE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACTION PLAN INTRODUCTION

In Scotland we have not been immune to the effects of the challenging economic picture that emerged across the globe in 2008. We also still face long term complex social problems that we must tackle together; inequalities in health, wealth and opportunity. The Scottish Government, acting with partners across the country, is determined to meet these challenges head on with vigour and creativity. We want to see a step change in how we address the big issues we face.

The Government has taken early action to address our economic challenges and has also launched, in partnership with COSLA, three frameworks which will be the dawn of a new social policy. These set the scene for a sustained long term effort to tackle inequality in Scotland. They cover the key areas of health, early years, and poverty all of which will be affected positively by empowered and engaged communities.

The confidence and resilience that grows when people work together in their communities is never more important than in challenging economic times and when facing major social problems.

This means that community empowerment – the ability of people to do things for themselves – forms a key plank of the Scottish Government’s approach to delivering a more successful Nation.

In April 2008, the Scottish Government and COSLA announced a joint statement of commitment to community empowerment. This is an important first for Scotland. It sets Government at national and local level on a long term path to make sure that more communities become more empowered across the country.

This Action Plan builds on that statement and provides clarity on what community empowerment is, why community empowerment is important and how communities become empowered. It also sets out a range of new and existing practical actions which underpin the process of community empowerment. Taken together, these actions are designed to help everyone involved in community empowerment to deliver more empowered communities over the coming years.

The plan takes account of the views that were expressed by nearly 380 people in the dialogue on making community empowerment a reality, that took place at the end of 2007. It has also been developed with the active involvement of COSLA and third sector colleagues.

The launch of the plan signals a significant milestone on a journey. In some places there will need to be a process of culture change, in communities and the public agencies who support them, to make sure that local people have opportunities and the ability to play their full part in helping Scotland to flourish. At times there may be a need to re-visit where power and control currently reside, as we continue to develop the relationship between Government and communities across the country.

This change process may not always be straightforward or comfortable, there are barriers to overcome when empowering communities whether they are the affects of poverty, or lack of confidence or isolation, but the benefits that can flow from people having more responsibility for their own destinies are potentially so great, that we must overcome the challenges and barriers together, as we seek to develop the confidence and ambition that lies within our communities.

WHY COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IS IMPORTANT

DELIVERING ON OUR SHARED OUTCOMES

Scotland's communities are a rich source of talent and creative potential and the process of community empowerment helps to unlock that potential. It stimulates and harnesses the energy of local people to come up with creative and successful solutions to local challenges. Community empowerment is a key element in helping to achieve a more successful Scotland and in delivering our shared outcomes.

The Scottish Government has a clear purpose to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth, and it is determined to work in partnership across Scottish society to deliver on that purpose.

The purpose is underpinned by five strategic objectives and the new National Performance framework, which sets out a set of agreed outcomes in a range of areas that will be critical to making Scotland more successful. This new approach to delivering change plays out at Local Authority level through the new Single Outcome Agreements, which are a product of the new, mature and trusting relationship between central and local Government. From 2009/10, Single Outcome Agreements will be developed by Community Planning Partnerships in recognition of the fact that all of Scottish society, the public and third sectors and communities themselves, have a role to play in delivering the purpose.

We want more communities across the country to have more opportunities to play their part in helping to deliver the outcomes that matter to Scotland. This is about all of us recognising that communities doing things for themselves can sometimes be the best way of delivering change. This will require mature dialogue between the public sector and community groups, underpinned by trust and respect. Community Planning Partnerships should each think very carefully about the role that communities themselves can play in delivering Single Outcome Agreements. The Scottish Government is clear that we have some way to go before we realise the full potential that communities have to help deliver economic growth that benefits everyone in Scotland, wherever they live, and in a way that leaves a legacy for future generations.



We want more communities across the country to have more opportunities to play their part in helping to deliver the outcomes that matter to Scotland.

INVIGORATING DEMOCRACY

Community Empowerment also plays a vital role in the democratic life of Scotland. Elected representatives at all levels of Government in Scotland have a key role to play in providing leadership and promoting the active involvement of the Scottish people in the democratic life of the country. They are responsible for key decisions on delivering services and deploying significant resources across the country in a way that is accountable to the Scottish people. The concordat between the Scottish Government and local Government cements the importance and legitimacy of the role of elected representatives in delivering a better Scotland and explicitly commits Government in Scotland to work together in a mature and trusting way.

However, elected representatives on their own cannot deliver the vibrant democracy in our communities that we need in the 21st century in Scotland. Government at national and local level sees the process of community empowerment as a key way of complementing representative democracy.

When local people are actively engaged in tackling issues within their community, and in helping to realise the community's potential, those people are likely to have an increased interest in and engagement with the affairs of local government and indeed Government across the board.

This active involvement is most often driven by the community groups who exist in our neighbourhoods, towns and villages, whether they be community councils, registered tenant organisations, community based housing associations, or one of the many other models that communities choose for themselves. Often, different community groups working together can be a powerful way of stimulating community action and helping people to engage with the public sector.

In particular, the leadership role of local elected members, who are closest to our communities, plays a vital part in promoting and supporting the work of these community based groups as part of our everyday democratic lives. The key to a vibrant democracy is that all the players with an interest work together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect – even where there may be disagreements – with a focus on the needs and aspirations of the wider community.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

From existing evidence, we'd expect to see a number of positive changes when a community becomes more empowered. Increased confidence and skills amongst local people; higher numbers of people volunteering in their communities; higher levels of satisfaction with quality of life in a local neighbourhood. All of these benefits flow from people feeling more in control of their lives.

Community empowerment can also have a less tangible, but nevertheless very powerful outcome. It can give people a long term stake in the future of their communities, and can confirm and strengthen community pride; bringing people together from right across communities, from a variety of backgrounds to work for a better future.

Each of these are important reasons in their own right for supporting community empowerment. Taken together, they provide a compelling case for all of us to strive to help more communities become more empowered.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT?

The Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed the following definition:

“Community empowerment is a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them.”

Coming up with a definition wasn't straightforward, but it was absolutely necessary to be as clear as we could about what we mean by community empowerment. There may be debates about the specific wording of this definition. But if we put these to one side, on one level, communities who feel a sense of control over what happens at a local level know exactly what empowerment is. Fundamentally, it is about people taking collective action to make change happen on their own terms.

Community empowerment is a highly complex process to achieve and requires the active understanding and commitment from a wide number of stakeholders to achieve it. Community empowerment can be a slow, gradual process which involves continual learning and the constant building of a community's capacity to take on more – there is no finite end point in the process of community empowerment.

COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST AND IDENTITY

Communities are often defined by the place they live, often single or small sets of neighbourhoods. However many people feel part of communities around common issues or circumstances, such as disability, age, or ethnic minority and may want to join together and organise over larger geographical areas, such as a town or local authority area.

Our commitment to empowerment includes these communities of identity and interest. They are likely to have particular needs and priorities for public services and want power and influence in relation to these. In some cases they may want to directly deliver services.

In prioritising and resourcing communities of identity and interest, we should focus on those communities experiencing disadvantage or inequalities, for example in relation to race, disability, and those most in need of greater capacity.

EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

Throughout the dialogue process we heard time and again that the process of community empowerment must be about everyone living in a community having the opportunity to get involved. Any model that fails to take positive steps to include all sections of a community, is not community empowerment.

We need to remember that at the moment too many inequalities still exist in our society and that too many people can be excluded from fulfilling their potential by discrimination, victimisation or harassment. People can face these problems because of their race or ethnic background, because of a disability or their age, sexual orientation, religion or gender.

Community Empowerment must recognise and celebrate the richness that different cultures and backgrounds bring to our society. We must be aware and help overcome the barriers and difficulties that some people face in getting involved in their communities. This means that community groups must look very closely at how inclusive and welcoming they are being, and of course we all in the public sector have a duty to promote equalities.

This can mean investing in practical action, for example training on equalities and diversity for staff and communities, and challenging some negative influences of stereotyping and lack of awareness of equalities issues. We heard through the dialogue that people from a diverse range of backgrounds – some who face major personal challenges – are very keen to become involved and to contribute their considerable talents and insights, but often need to be welcomed and supported into the process, both by public agencies and by communities themselves.

HOW DO COMMUNITIES BECOME EMPOWERED?

There are many different ways in which communities can become more empowered. There is no one model which would fit every circumstance. For some communities empowerment will involve owning assets, and controlling budgets, or generating their own income to re-invest. In some cases, communities will want to take action around an injustice or to protect a valued resource. Others will want to have an enhanced role in shaping the services delivered on their behalf by others.

All of these approaches can be empowering depending on the circumstances. Whatever models work for different communities, they must provide an explicit and real increase in the level of power and influence that local people have. The key thing is that empowerment cannot be given to communities by others. Communities must decide the level of empowerment they want and how to get there themselves.

Most often a critical characteristic of communities which are empowered is the existence of locally owned, community led organisations which often act as ‘anchors’ for the process of empowerment. These organisations, which may be the local housing association, church group, community association, development trust, community council or any combination of these, often have a range of characteristics that enable them to provide a local leadership role and a focal point for other local services and groups. Some of these characteristics include: that they are multi-purpose, usually operate from a physical hub, and will often own or manage other community assets. The confidence and ability of these groups is closely linked to the confidence and ability of the people who are involved in them. Individuals who feel empowered can bring a dynamic and enterprising approach to the work of their groups.



Storytelling Session, Glenshee

HOW COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORTS COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Often the very things that create disadvantage – poverty, lack of educational opportunity, poor health, and poor transport links – also create barriers to bringing about the empowerment that is one of the key ingredients for bringing about real change. Many of our communities, particularly those facing high levels of disadvantage in both urban and rural areas, will need support to help them build the skills, confidence, networks and resources they require on the journey towards becoming more empowered.

We call that range of support community capacity building and it can be a critical step in laying the foundations for community empowerment. Partners need to invest time, money and skills into work that supports community capacity building, if they are serious about community empowerment.

This means investing in highly skilled support for what is a complex process. Activities to help build confidence will contribute to community empowerment only if they are linked to support for building effective organisations. These will only have a longer term impact if people are enabled to learn from their experiences. Developing local leadership needs to be combined with widening involvement and participatory processes. These processes build communities' capacity to engage effectively with public bodies, develop services, and ultimately improve community life.

Specialist staff who form a relationship with communities and groups, and support them over a period of time and through different stages of their development, play an important role in community capacity building. Other staff, working in a range of settings and providing an input to community capacity building as one part of their role, also contribute significantly (and also need specific skills in order to be able to do so effectively). The most effective capacity building is usually embedded into the process of helping communities take action towards their goals.

In Scotland, work to build community capacity building is often developed under the umbrella of community learning and development. This puts it in a strong context where it is linked to a range of other non-formal learning and social development work with individuals, groups and communities.¹ Community learning and development is delivered by a wide range of organisations, often working in partnership, including local authorities, third sector organisations and a range of other partners like health boards, colleges and others.

The Scottish Government has set out clear expectations of the outcomes community capacity building should deliver.² Community capacity building in CLD focuses on achieving:

- Confident, skilled, active and influential communities.
- Effective and inclusive community organisations.
- Effective relationships between community organisations and other organisations and services.

¹ In *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* (2004) the Scottish Government defines community learning and development as 'learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities using a range of formal and informal methods. A common defining feature is that programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants'.

² *Delivering Change: understanding the outcomes of community learning and development* (Communities Scotland: 2006).

Staff providing community capacity building support can face challenging issues of accountability and may be working with communities on issues that are politically sensitive. It is therefore important that their work is informed by commitment to a widely-understood set of principles. *Working and Learning Together* sets out the following principles as those on which community learning and development practice should be based:

- Empowerment;
- Participation;
- Inclusion, equality of opportunity and anti-discrimination;
- Self-determination; and
- Partnership.

These principles should be embedded in work to promote Community Empowerment, in evaluations of its effectiveness and in assessments of its quality.

Our evidence is that communities that receive high quality community capacity building support can become more active, influential and more able to work together to achieve change that matters to them.³

It is therefore important that the full range of partners with an interest in community empowerment also pay attention to support for community capacity building. Structures to develop strategic partnership approaches to building community capacity often exist as part of partnership working for community learning and development, under the umbrella of Community Planning. Partners should take advantage of and build on these structures to make the most of the available resources to support community capacity building.

The Scottish Government and COSLA have also agreed a joint statement on community learning and development, building on “Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities”, which was launched on 28 November 2008. This will mutually reinforce the messages sent out in this action plan about the important contribution that community learning and development, and community capacity building within that, can make to the empowerment of all our communities.

³ Literature review of the outcomes of community learning and development (University of Edinburgh: 2006).

ROLES

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, NATIONAL AND LOCAL

Government in Scotland has a shared role to provide strategic leadership in promoting and supporting community empowerment. This action plan is a key step towards delivering that role.

At National level the Scottish Government will ensure that the benefits of community empowerment are understood across its portfolios and that references to the part community empowerment can play in achieving our Strategic Objectives are made in appropriate policies. The Scottish Government will also continue to promote the benefits of community empowerment across a range of partners. It will continue to develop policy in partnership with others to help to further develop culture change.

The Scottish Government is investing around £2m in the wide ranging actions which will build capacity for empowerment in this plan. Since May 2007, the Government has also developed new and extended existing, grant programmes which are accessible to community groups, which total approximately £180m to 2011. These practical actions and resources will provide some of the key underpinning for the culture change we want to see happen.

At local level, local authorities, in particular through their elected members, have a key role to play in promoting the benefits of community empowerment and engagement, in particular in articulating how communities themselves can help to deliver outcomes set out in Single Outcome Agreements. Councils also have a key role in helping to drive a further culture shift which will see community empowerment as a process which can help to deliver a range of local outcomes. Local Government also has a key role to play in continuing to support and develop the community groups which are the backbone of the community empowerment process. This may involve rethinking the focus of current community engagement and community learning and development work to ensure that resources and staff time are allocated to activities that make the most impact in building the capacity of local communities.



Bus trip to Wester Hailes to see good examples



Visiting good examples of environmental improvements: Livingston

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

The formation, existence and development of, democratic, inclusive and competent community groups, is key to community empowerment. These are the groups who provide the focus for community led action. They are around for the long term and have strong ties into the wider community. They will take many forms: Development Trusts; community based housing associations; community councils; registered tenant organisations; community forums. The list could go on. The key thing is not the precise model, but that they are recognised in their communities as important, open organisations.

The process of community empowerment relies on these organisations being in place. Support for the development of these organisations should be a key focus for investing in community capacity building. We want to see the ongoing strengthening of groups who are committed to equalities and connecting to their wider communities, who are ambitious and visionary; and who take an energetic and enterprising approach to their work.

COSLA's signing of the joint statement of commitment to community empowerment means in practice that Local Authorities want to ensure that levels of community empowerment increase across their communities over the coming years. Councils are committed to exploring opportunities where local communities can take on more responsibility for helping to achieve outcomes set out in Single Outcome Agreements. Local Government in Scotland firmly believes in the invaluable role that many community groups play in the life of their cities, towns and villages and want to strengthen that role.

COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIPS

For community empowerment there are significant gains to be made by joined-up approaches across partners at Local Authority level and more locally. Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) are best placed to lead this. These high level partnerships provide strategic direction at Local Authority level and from 2009/10 are responsible for developing Single Outcome Agreements with the Scottish Government. They are the places where the key service providers in an area come together to plan priorities and discuss service delivery. Partnerships bring together the senior people from local authorities; health boards; police and fire services; enterprise bodies and the voluntary sector on a regular basis.

In relation to community empowerment there are two things that CPPs can do:

Promote and support joined up approaches to community capacity building as both the foundation of a sustainable approach to community empowerment and engagement, and a means to help communities work on their own issues. This might involve:

- Assessing community strengths and responding to priority gaps in community infrastructure;
- Ensuring access to the basic operating requirements of community organisations, such as accessible places to meet and childcare;
- Mapping community capacity building support, in terms of its reach to the communities that need it most, as well as its capacity to support community groups through various stages of development from formation to managing assets if they choose to;
- Ensuring accessibility of community capacity building support, for example through appropriate information, and referral arrangements across partners for groups seeking support.

Embedding community empowerment throughout processes for Community Planning. This might involve:

- Continuing to build upon current work to support community engagement;
- Self-evaluating current processes for Community Planning in terms of their impact on community empowerment;
- As part of developing new initiatives and processes, think about the part that communities themselves can play in delivering outcomes;
- Providing leadership to Community Planning partners in making their individual processes empowering for communities.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

How we measure that community empowerment is making a difference is not straightforward. This is partly because community empowerment can take so many different forms. At one level, how to measure impact must be decided on a case by case basis, depending on what activity is being taken forward by which kind of group or community. However, even that can be a challenging process, involving some complex debates and difficult decisions.

There are though a number of pieces of work underway in Scotland which can help in this context. Perhaps most importantly, Single Outcome Agreements have been developed and many of these SOAs include indicators and measures that relate to community engagement and community empowerment. Across the UK other indicators of community strength have been developed and there are questions in the Scottish Household survey which relate to people's ability to influence decisions.

Audit Scotland are also developing their approach to Best Value II audits which will contain a specific focus on how local government and their partners are engaging with communities.

The key thing then, is to bring coherence to this picture and to help people to understand how best to measure the impact of community empowerment. The Scottish Government will work with COSLA and the third sector to develop a piece of work that will deliver that coherence.

It is also important that we reflect regularly on developments at a National level and we will review progress with this action plan with partners in a year's time in April 2010.

STAND TOGETHER



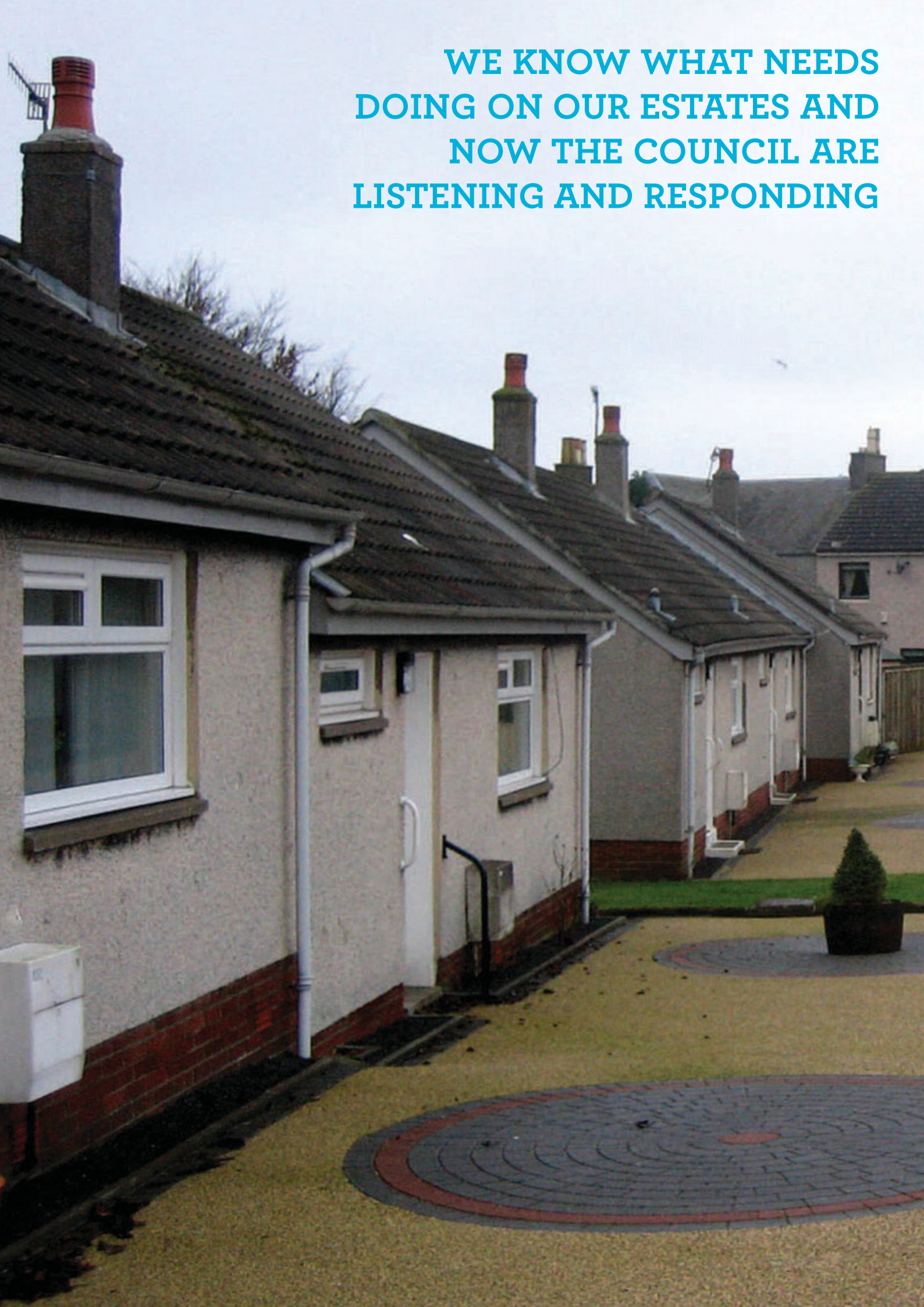
SPECIFIC ACTIONS

For community empowerment to become a reality, we need to do more than simply set out and understand the key principles which underpin empowerment and the roles of people involved. We need to invest in practical actions which will help to build capacity to deliver empowerment. Each in their own different ways, these actions will help to support the long term culture change that will be needed to see more communities becoming more empowered. They are not designed simply as eye catching gimmicks, but are designed to address many of the serious issues that affect a community's ability to become more empowered.

As we are continuing on a journey, it is highly likely that other actions may occur to people in time and we will consider gaps and new ideas when we review the plan in a year's time.

All of the actions set out in this part of the plan have been heavily influenced by the messages we heard through our dialogue process that took place from October to December 2007. Given that nearly 380 people gave of their time and energy to take part in that process it was important to us to take account of people's views.

WE KNOW WHAT NEEDS
DOING ON OUR ESTATES AND
NOW THE COUNCIL ARE
LISTENING AND RESPONDING



HIGHLIGHTING EXISTING EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

A key message from the dialogue was that we shouldn't invent new community empowerment schemes, structures or processes. The point was made often that there was much for us to celebrate in Scotland. Many community activists said that they felt empowered through their involvement in existing community groups.

There was a clear call though that Government should get better at highlighting and celebrating existing examples of community empowerment. The purpose of this is to build enthusiasm for community empowerment and to show what can be achieved by empowered communities. The impact of highlighting these models will be to give more communities, and the people who support them, the confidence and ambition to achieve more themselves.

We are delighted that twelve examples from across Scotland agreed to be highlighted in this plan. We approached these groups on the basis that they show a range of models that people told us could be empowering. They involve communities owning assets, people playing a key role in influencing decisions about spending public money; they show what can be achieved by particular types of community organisation; community councils, registered tenant organisations and community based housing associations.

We also wanted to make sure that we included examples from urban and rural Scotland, as the successes we can celebrate exist right across the country in very different kinds of communities.

The examples that we highlight here focus on telling people's stories from their own perspective. They are designed to generate enthusiasm for the community empowerment agenda and to show that we want to get better at celebrating what communities themselves describe as success.

As we would expect, each example describes a community on a journey, some are farther along in their journey than others. Some have clear ambitions now to become even more empowered, whilst some are happy at this point with the degree of empowerment they experience.

Later in the spring, we will publish a companion document to the Action Plan that will provide more detail on each of the examples. This will draw out the learning from each example about how communities have become empowered.

We know that there are many, many more examples we could have approached, and as we go forward we want to explore opportunities to highlight some other existing examples, or new examples as they emerge.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODEL SCHEME OF ESTABLISHMENT FOR COMMUNITY COUNCILS AND A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COMMUNITY COUNCILLORS

The 1973 Local Government Scotland Act defines the statutory purpose of Community Councils thus: “In addition to any other purpose which a Community Council may pursue, the general purpose of a Community Council shall be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area, and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents, in relation to matters for which those authorities are responsible, and to take such action in the interests of that community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable”. The Scottish Government is aware of several community councils who, either independently, or in discussion and agreement with their local authority, undertake a wide range of other responsibilities.

The Model Scheme was developed by the Community Council Working Group (CCWG) with a view to the finalised Scheme providing a minimum basis for local authorities to adopt, should they wish to do so. This will allow for parity and greater consistency between Schemes and therefore, the operation of Community Councils, throughout Scotland.

The Code of Conduct for Community Councillors produced by the CCWG is based largely on the Code of Conduct for local authority councillors and relevant public bodies as provided for in the 2000 Act. The introduction of the Code will help to build trust in the working relationships between Community Councils, other community organisations and Councils.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES TO OWN ASSETS

Communities owning their own land and buildings can have a huge impact on their empowerment. Asset ownership won't be the answer for all communities, depending on their circumstances and their own wishes, but it can be very powerful.

Asset ownership can have key impacts. It can provide revenue for community organisations, making them more sustainable in the long term. It can give local people a renewed sense of pride in their communities, a real sense of a stake in the future of the places they live and work. For some community organisations, working towards asset ownership can be a fantastic catalyst for the group growing and maturing.

Of course many community organisations in Scotland already own assets – our highlighted examples include Gigha and Cordale Housing association who own significant amounts of land and buildings. We also have a long history of work that has supported asset ownership and development – most notably in rural Scotland. This includes the community right to buy legislation which has enabled communities to form over 120 properly constituted companies, or community bodies, register their community interest in land, and have a pre-emptive right to buy the land when it comes up for sale. Financial assistance and guidance has been provided over the years by the Scottish Land Fund, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise Community Land Unit. There is also a strong tradition of community based housing associations who, along with their housing stock, have played a major part in developing a range of other assets, from managed workspaces to community facilities.

In recent years community asset ownership and development has also benefited greatly from the existence of BIG Lottery Scotland's Growing Community Assets programme. This has provided £50m for community organisations to acquire and develop a wide range of assets.

So there is much to build on. However, taking on the ownership of assets is a complicated business. There are many pitfalls that can get in the way of community asset ownership working. Indeed, there may be occasions when a community seeking to own an asset may be the wrong way to develop the community. There are also important questions of principle and practice that have to be carefully considered in relation to asset ownership, for example if an asset is to be transferred from public sector ownership into community ownership there are important considerations like value for money and accountability to the public which have to be looked at carefully. In any circumstance where a community takes on an asset the issue of identifying and securing ongoing revenue streams to develop and maintain the asset is critical; otherwise communities find themselves stuck with a liability rather than an asset.

We will invest resources in new work that will help to overcome some of these barriers to ensure that community asset ownership happens in a way that benefits communities.

Working with colleagues in the third and public sectors, we will:

- Highlight examples where assets have been successfully transferred from local authorities to community groups;
- Highlight examples where local authorities have developed a strategic approach to community asset ownership;
- Issue revised guidance to local authorities on disposing of assets at less than best consideration;
- Develop a toolkit that helps people to assess the risks and benefits of community asset ownership;
- Work with BIG Lottery Scotland, in the context of their consultation on their future programme and Ministerial directions, to learn from the Growing Community Assets programme and consider future support for community asset ownership.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL COUNCILLORS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Elected members have a key role to play in setting strategic direction locally and promoting and supporting community empowerment. Many councillors currently provide invaluable support to their local community groups; helping them to have their voices heard and to overcome hurdles they face in getting things done.

There could be major benefits though in supporting councillors from across the country to share their experiences, to learn from each other and to be kept up to date with the latest developments in the theory and practice of community empowerment and engagement.

Working with the Local Government Improvement Service, the Scottish Government will fund a new training programme on community empowerment and engagement for elected members across the country. This will be a first for Scotland.

The course will focus on the policy, theory and practice of community empowerment and engagement, and will provide a space for councillors to consider how they can use their community leadership role to ensure that more communities become more empowered in Scotland.

TRAINING TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

There are still people who are charged with working with communities who won't have a very clear idea about what community empowerment means – or indeed what community engagement is. Others will lack the skills necessary for supporting community groups adequately.

People having the right skills and knowledge to effectively engage with and empower local people is key.

We will invest at National level to develop learning materials that will be of use in the real world and that will help to improve practice. This will build on the skills and competencies set out in Better Community Engagement – a framework for learning. We will develop these materials by working in partnership with people who are engaging with communities on the ground.

Community activists also benefit from learning at a national level. We will learn the lessons from the previous Community Voices Network, which was evaluated in 2007, to develop appropriate ways to increase local people's learning. We believe that activists sharing their own experience of empowerment is a powerful way of spreading the message of the benefits it can bring and the different approaches to achieving it. We will work with partners to develop the detail of this work over the coming months.

INVESTMENT TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

In 2007 the Scottish Government published an online resource guide to support community capacity building practice.⁴ This was followed by *Strengthening Scotland's Communities*,⁵ a programme of support to, and dialogue with, partners working to build community capacity across Scotland. The Scottish Government is currently funding the development of comprehensive practice guidance for community capacity building. This will be published and disseminated in 2009.

The Scottish Government is also currently funding a range of local partners to model solutions to national challenges in relation to effective community capacity building, by developing effective local approaches from which lessons can be shared across Scotland.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PILOT:

During our dialogue, many people said that local people having more direct influence over public spending in their area, could be empowering.

The Scottish Government and COSLA will establish, by autumn 2009, a participatory budgeting pilot exercise focused on tackling Anti-Social behaviour – an issue we know many communities care deeply about – across three Community Planning Partnership areas as part of the community empowerment agenda. Participatory budgeting should enable local community and neighbourhood groups to influence local action by helping to direct how small action funds are spent to develop solutions to local antisocial behaviour problems. This pilot exercise will be supported by COSLA and the Scottish Government through the provision of training, guidance and match-funding.

⁴ *Building Community Capacity: resources for community learning and development practice* (Scottish Government: 2007).

⁵ *Strengthening Scotland's Communities: community capacity building practice development programme* (Scottish Government: 2008).

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME – DIRECT INVESTMENT ACCESSIBLE BY COMMUNITY GROUPS

Since May 2007, the Scottish Government has shown its commitment to empowering communities by both putting in place a range of new funding programmes, for example the Climate Challenge Fund which is absolutely about supporting community led solutions, and continuing and increasing some existing funding streams, for example the Wider Role fund, that community groups have access to. We set out here that Community Empowerment Programme that covers a range of policy areas and different kinds of community groups.

Taken together these funding streams total approximately £180m⁶ of Scottish Government and European funding over the three year period 2008/11, a significant amount of potential direct investment in the work that communities want to do themselves.



Opening Celebration of the Backlands Project

⁶ This total includes money from the European Union in the Scottish Rural Development Programme which is matched by the Scottish Government.

WIDER ROLE FUND – £36m

To enable registered social landlords to play a full part in the economic, physical and social regeneration of their communities.

CLIMATE CHALLENGE FUND – £27.4m

To enable communities to come forward with their own solutions to make a significant reduction in carbon emissions. There is an emphasis on capacity building within communities to facilitate climate change action, and this is supported through a network of Non Government Organisations and voluntary sector organisations in an alliance to ensure that community involvement is at the heart of this work. The Fund projects can involve a range of actions, and should be delivered in the context of the wider environmental, social or economic dimensions.

RENEWABLES – £21.5m

To enable communities to maximise benefits from local renewables developments through grants scheme and advisory network of local development officers administered by intermediaries.

Funding available for technical/feasibility studies (up to £10K) as well as capital (up to £100K) for projects.

SCOTTISH RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME; LEADER; RURAL PRIORITIES

APPROXIMATELY £29M FOR LEADER AND £15M FOR COMMUNITIES IN RDCS

To enable community groups to contribute to agreed rural development priorities

LEADER is aimed at local development projects driven by community groups and having a wide community benefit through decisions taken by local partnership groups to deliver their local development strategy.

Rural Development Contracts (RDCs) – Regional Priorities is a competitive process under which community applications will be judged on their ability to deliver national and regional outcomes. Recommendations are made on a regional basis but decisions are finalised centrally.

INCREASE 3 – £7.5m

A grant scheme run for Scottish Government by delivery bodies WRAP and Community Recycling Network for Scotland. Supports innovative community-sector waste-related projects aligned with the 'reduce, re-use, recycle' ethos. Separate 'strands' support 'Enterprise' and 'Prevention' projects, with an additional 2 strands supporting capacity-building in the sector and a small-scale (<£5K) grant programme which is simpler to access than the main strands.

THE COMMUNITY CHEST & VOLUNTEERING SCOTLAND GRANTS – £3m

To build the capacity of small community groups. A small grant scheme run by the Voluntary Action Fund.

RACE, RELIGION, AND REFUGEE INTEGRATION FUND – £5.6m

To improve the lives of minority ethnic and faith communities in Scotland, including refugees and asylum seekers as well as migrant workers and Gypsies/Travellers.

FORESTRY FOR PEOPLE CHALLENGE FUND – £1.5m

To help groups realise the potential contribution of local woodlands to the health, learning and strengthening of communities.

SCOTTISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (WOMEN'S FUND FOR SCOTLAND) – £600K

Scottish Community Foundation awards grants of between £250 and £250k to strengthen Scotland's communities. It awards grants to disadvantaged and marginalised groups in Scotland and has run a Women's Fund designed to promote gender equality and to tackle sexual discrimination since 2002. Women's Fund for Scotland provide grants of up to £5k through an open application process to organisations.

SPORTSMATCH –

APPROXIMATELY £1.2m

Supports grass roots sport projects that encourage participation at community level, especially youth groups. It aims to match commercial business sponsorship on a £ for £ basis and has three primary objectives: to encourage businesses to sponsor community sports, to foster lasting partnerships between business and community sport, to further develop and improve community access to sport through quality business sponsorships.

BUILDING FOR SPORT PROGRAMME –

APPROXIMATELY £22m (SPECIFICALLY ALLOCATED TO COMMUNITY FACILITIES STRAND)

Within this programme there is a strand which includes the provision or upgrading of any facilities used for sport in the general community. Applications for such awards need to align with the strategic plan of a local authority or of a governing body.

SCIENCE ENGAGEMENT GRANTS –

APPROXIMATELY £1.2m

Better public understanding of STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) subjects/science policy.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT, HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE GRANT –

APPROXIMATELY £12m

Focused on community groups, social enterprises, or other community ‘anchor organisations’.

Activities include:

Capacity building, asset-based community development (predominantly acquisition and management of land, buildings and renewable energy production), developing social enterprises, community account management (as an extension to the Initiative at the Edge programme), development based on the Gaelic language and the distinctive arts and cultural heritage of the Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) area.

HIE also funds more generic development in the Social Enterprise, Community Land, Community Renewable Energy, Arts and Culture, and Gaelic based sectors.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND VOICE

During our dialogue process, while everyone saw potential benefits in communities being more empowered, there was a strong view that many communities simply wanted better opportunities to be heard by public sector bodies when they are planning and delivering services.

This part of the plan therefore reflects the continuing importance of community engagement, as part of a spectrum of working with communities. We will continue to promote the National Standards for community engagement as good practice. The Standards have been recommended by Audit Scotland as good practice and have been the subject of a recent positive evaluation of their impact.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/standards>

We are also investing £250k over two years for the development and promotion of the VOiCE community engagement database. VOiCE is underpinned by the National Standards and can support organisations to:

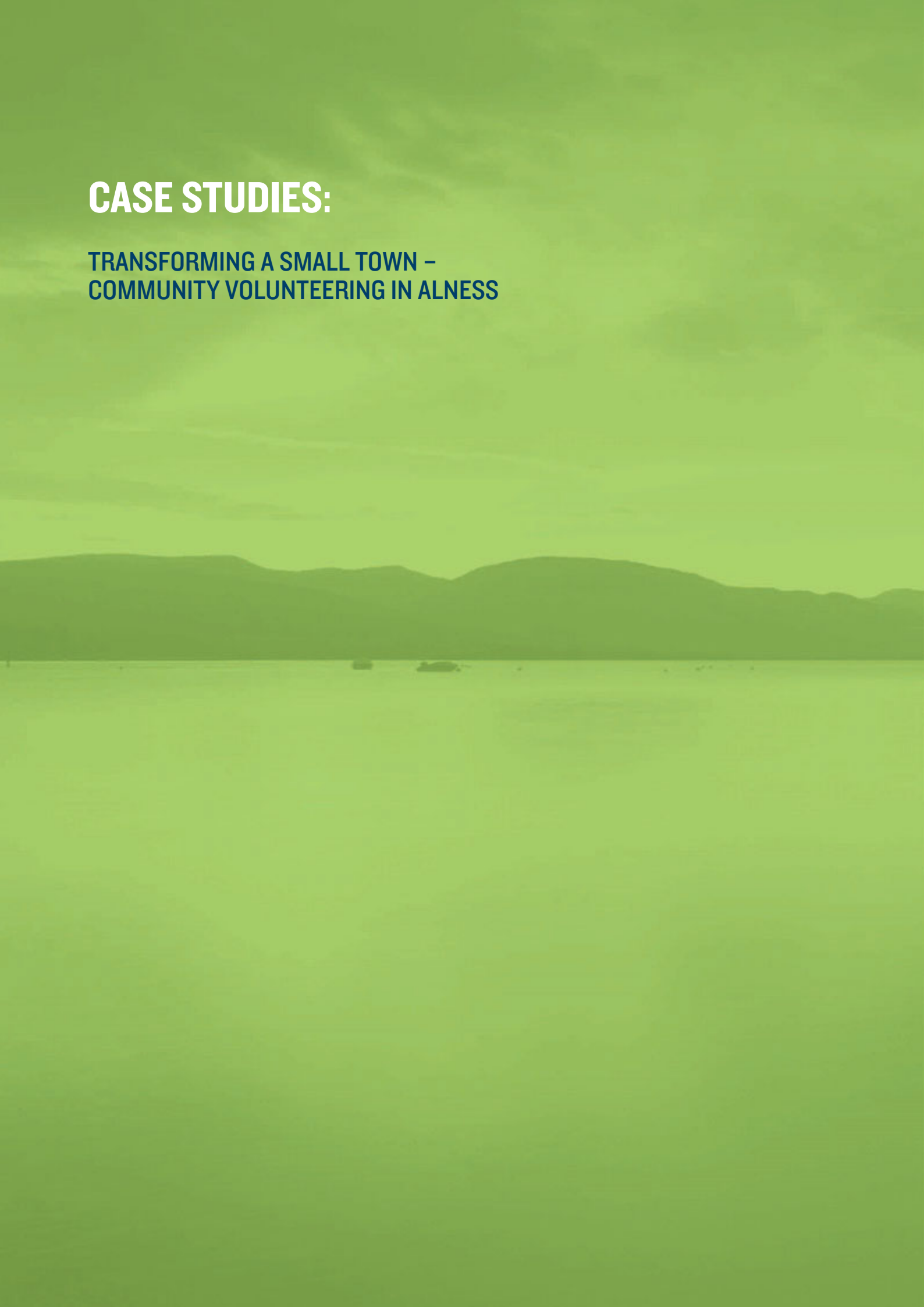
- plan community engagement and service user participation
- conduct it effectively
- monitor and record the process
- evaluate the outcomes.

It can be used to support a range of participation from overall area regeneration to specific concerns of users of particular services. It is designed to be relevant both for individual services and for integrated, cross disciplinary community planning. VOiCE enables all users to have a common system for analysing, planning, monitoring, evaluating and recording that provides common definition of terms and understanding of different types and purposes of engagement. It will carry the records of all engagements conducted in an area and enable analysis of patterns and outcomes of engagement.

We have asked the Scottish Community Development Centre to conduct a dissemination and development programme for VOiCE running through to March 2010. This enables every community planning partnership to make use of 2 days training and consultancy support from SCDC. This programme of support will be informed by the lessons of 6 VOiCE development sites with which SCDC is working to build up knowledge of how most effectively to use the tool. As we get the learning, we will place it on this site.

CASE STUDIES:

TRANSFORMING A SMALL TOWN –
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING IN ALNESS



“The Initiative has certainly had its challenges and sometimes we meet delays and frustrations, but we keep focused on our ‘shopping list’ of priorities that people in the town put forward. We’re all local volunteers and it’s this involvement which has helped to create civic pride and a sense of community ownership of both the issues we are tackling and of our achievements.”

Councillor Carolyn Wilson, Chair, Alness Initiative

Alness, a small town in Easter Ross, 20 miles north of Inverness, is no ordinary place. It has a history reaching back nearly eight centuries, but it is the last 40 years that have witnessed the most dramatic change.

The arrival of the Invergordon aluminium smelter in the early 1970s brought with it 500 new council homes and 2,000 construction workers. Oil projects in the Cromarty Firth added to a boom-town feel in Alness. The town’s population grew rapidly from 3,000 to 8,500 in just a few years. Another decade later and the smelter was gone, along with 900 ‘permanent’ jobs. Alness was devastated; unemployment rose to 20% overnight. Many shops and local businesses closed; the town developed a bad reputation.

The community here has always been resilient and forward thinking. Since those dark days, a passionate, enthusiastic and dedicated group of local volunteers have worked together to transform Alness into a highly desirable place, where people are rightly proud of their achievements.

With support from Highland Council, Ross and Cromarty Enterprise and many other funders, Alness now boasts a strong network of community organisations. Prominent among them is the Alness Initiative, set up by a group of local business people in 1995 and now the main umbrella organisation for the town. It brought together the local Community Councils, the town’s Community Association and business leaders; together they have set up and run a wide variety of regeneration projects in the town.

Prominent amongst these have been a complete transformation of the High Street, not least through the Alness Environmental Group’s focus on hanging baskets and flower tubs, and the purchase and renovation of a shop by Alness Community Association, to create a Heritage Centre. Local people run family learning projects, art programmes and a monthly newspaper. They have developed new facilities such as play parks, run holiday play schemes and lunch clubs for the elderly and sponsored cycle paths and a sculpture trail.



Alness in Bloom – a regular national prize winner



The newly-renovated Alness Heritage Centre

In 2007, the Alness Initiative won the British Urban Regeneration Award for community organisations with no full-time workers, a tribute to the strength of volunteering in the town. The judges comments speak for themselves...

“The Panel saw this project as outstanding in many ways and was particularly impressed by the significant input from local volunteers. Their passion, enthusiasm and dedication to delivering high quality services and opportunities for all people in the area has transformed Alness.”

British Urban Regeneration Association 2007

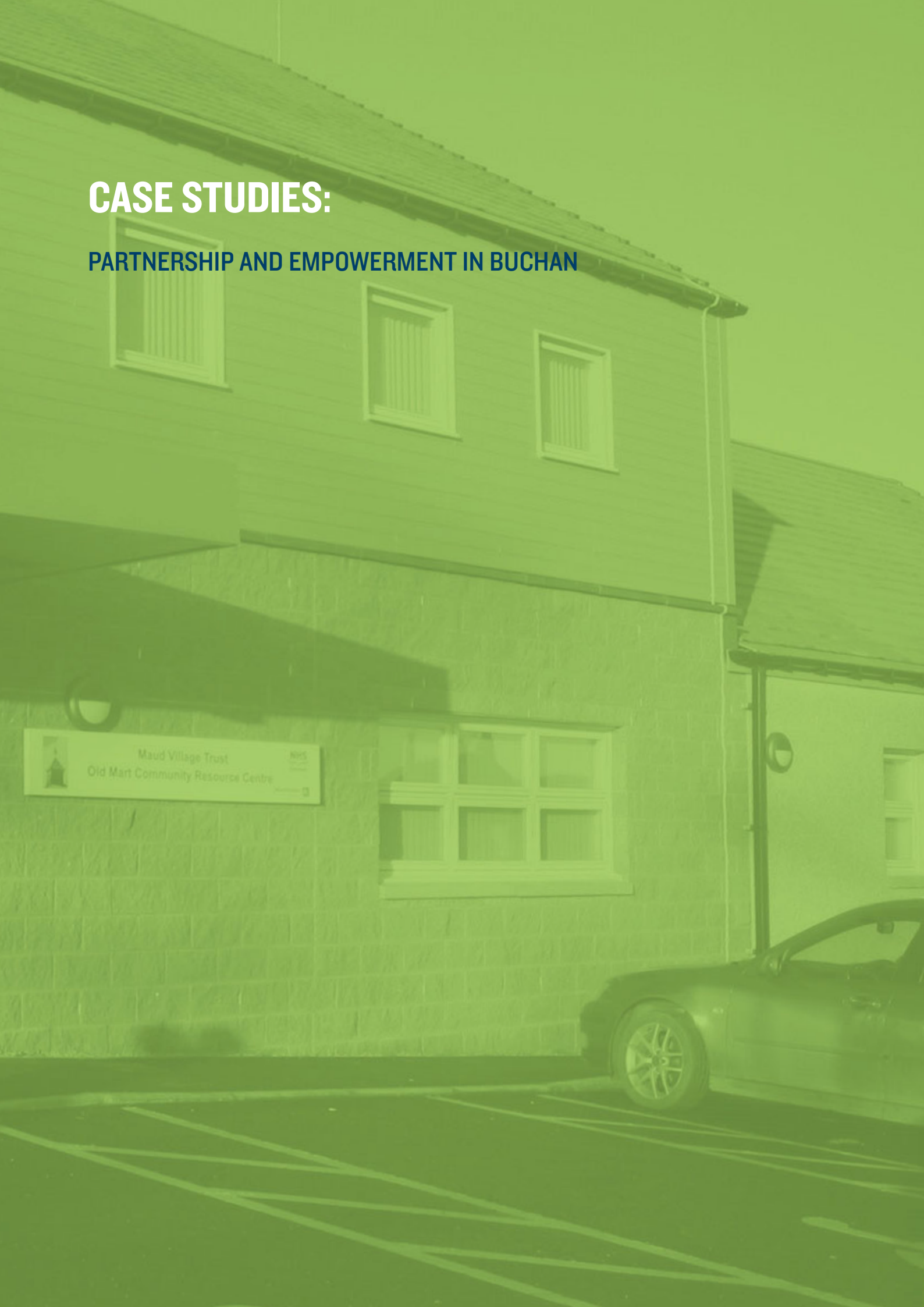
Two particular projects demonstrate the breadth of the Initiative’s activities in the town. Working closely with local residents associations and supported by Highland Council, the West Alness Save Project (WASP) was set up to provide an energy advisor to tackle fuel poverty by reducing electricity use. More than £50,000 was provided by Scottish and Southern Energy to support the project.

The Alness Heritage Group has spent many years developing a local Heritage Centre, now successfully up and running. A Heritage Lottery grant, a loan from Charity Bank and income raised by volunteers all helped to get this initiative off the ground. The Centre operates on an entirely voluntary basis, providing an exhibition space, conference venue, archive room and shop.

Alness has come a long way in the last forty years. It shows how local communities, faced with adversity, can turn their towns and villages round through the development of a strong network of co-ordinated initiatives, run by volunteers.

CASE STUDIES:

PARTNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT IN BUCHAN



“Our Partnership is all about empowering local people to do things for themselves and for their communities.”

Norma Thompson, Chair of Management Committee, Buchan Development Partnership

The Buchan Development Partnership is an independent, community-led Local Rural Partnership, tackling economic, social and environmental issues in the Buchan area of Aberdeenshire.

Since it began life in 2000, the Partnership has flourished. With three staff, a board of community directors and 100 member organisations, it offers support to a wide range of initiatives across this relatively remote rural area. Remote it may be, but behind the times it certainly is not.

One of the Partnership’s priorities is to encourage the growth of social enterprises in Buchan. These not-for-profit, community-based companies are growing in popularity – there are already more than one thousand of them in Scotland. Amongst Buchan’s members, a Dial-a-Bus company, an IT and e-learning training company (BITES) and Maud Village Trust are all up and running as highly successful social enterprises.

Maud Village Trust shows how a well-organised, community-led initiative can help bring a struggling village back to life. Maud was once home to Europe’s busiest livestock auctions, but when closure loomed, local people began the search for alternative uses for the redundant mart site. Eight years on, the mart has now been replaced by a bright new medical centre, gym, community resource centre, offices, a supported housing development and a garden, all reflecting the community’s priorities. Funding support has come from Awards for All, the Direct Grants Programme, Forward Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council, Communities Scotland, the Scottish Government through Future Builders and Shell Small Grants.

“We feel we’ve put the heart back into Maud. It has been hard work and taken a long time, but all our efforts are now paying off. Buchan Development Partnership was with us every step of the way – helping us organise the initial community consultations and then secure the £2.5m we needed to make it all happen.”

Pat Buckman, Secretary, Maud Village Trust



Maud Village Trust Old Market Community Resource Centre



Pat Buckman Secretary, Maud Village Trust

The Partnership has been involved in Community Planning since 2001, working with Aberdeenshire's Community Planning Partnership and on the ground with many local groups. It makes much use of Planning for Real®, to encourage everyone in a community to contribute to decision-making. The use of simple models to look at different options is a big change from the usual powerpoint presentations and expensive exhibitions, encouraging people to contribute to the development process, not just comment on the final proposals.

“In our experience, public meetings only provide a platform for the strongest voices; Planning for Real® is a very hands-on process that actively encourages everyone to contribute. We help local groups set these sessions up, but never lead them – we like to be on tap, but not on top.”

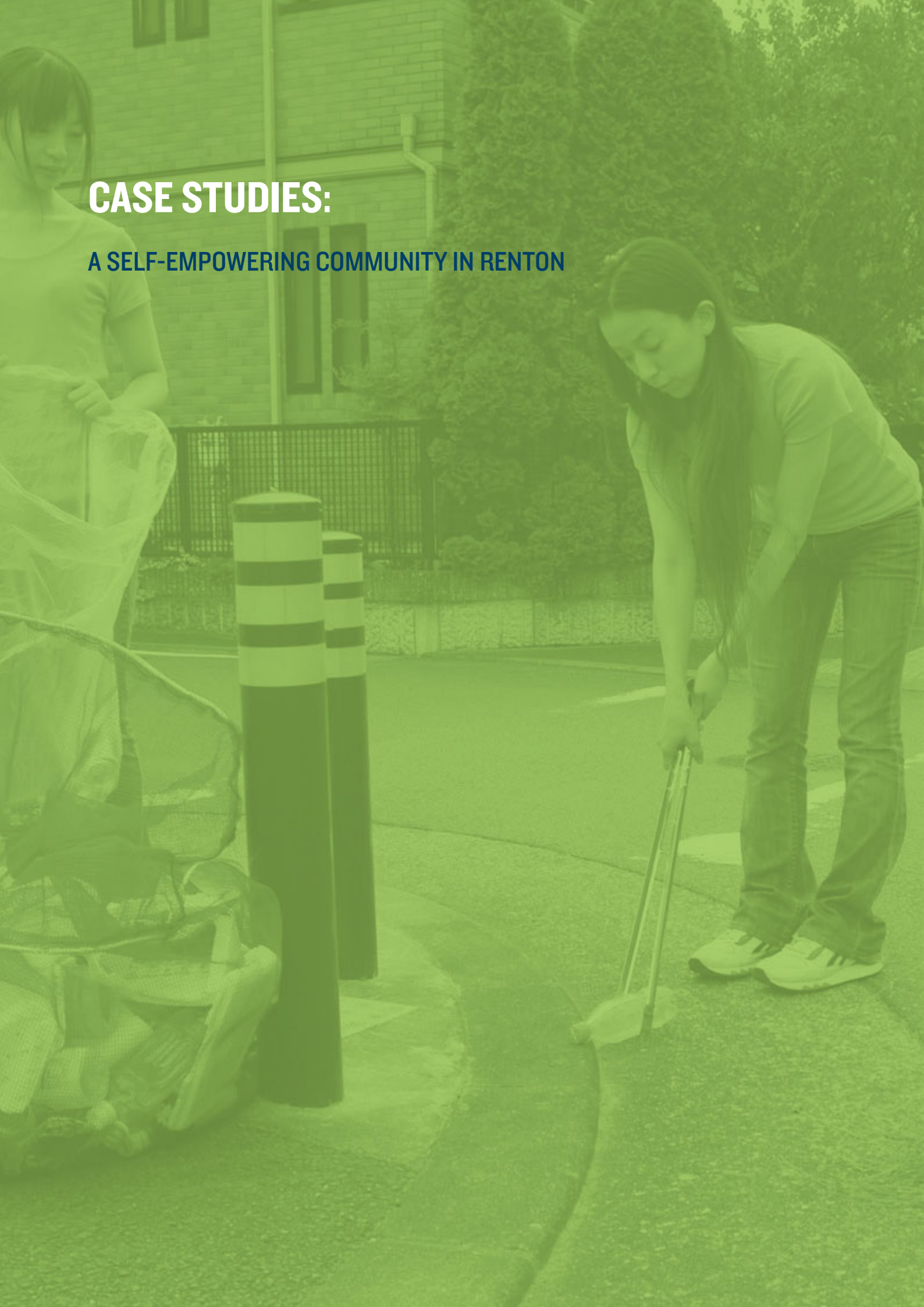
**Dawn Brody, Development Officer,
Buchan Development Partnership**

Funding is always an issue for support organisations, but the Buchan Partnership has been well supported by Government and European funding programmes, annual grants from Aberdeenshire Council and smaller amounts from Shell, the latter for administering a small grants scheme for local communities. Nevertheless, work is now underway to ensure the organisation's future by placing an increasing emphasis on earned income and less reliance on grants.

As it moves into its second decade, financial self-sufficiency and a continuing focus on empowering the rural communities of north east Aberdeenshire are firmly on its agenda.

CASE STUDIES:

A SELF-EMPOWERING COMMUNITY IN RENTON



“We are not here to build good quality homes for people to enjoy their poverty in.”

Archie Thomson, MBE, Chairperson Cordale Housing Association

Cordale Housing Association is at the heart of a 15 year programme of community-led investment which has turned a once notorious urban village in the Leven Valley into one of the most popular places to live in West Dunbartonshire.

Culturally rich but financially poor, Renton was once home to a thriving bleaching and dying industry, as well as supplying many workers for the Glasgow shipyards. Subsequent economic and social decline led to the village centre being described as the most depressing place in Scotland. No longer. Renton is now a place with an inspiring story to tell about the realities of community empowerment.

This is no ordinary regeneration project. Led by local people from its beginnings in the early 1990s, Cordale Housing Association has, with Government investment, built or modernised more than 400 homes in Renton, some of them transferred from the Council following an almost unanimous tenant's ballot. Alongside its new homes for rent and sale, developments which include 40 recently completed Extra Care apartments, it has spawned a Community Development Trust, a Social Enterprise Centre, an Integrated Healthy Living Centre and a Youth Centre.

The village supermarket, chemist and post office were all built by Cordale; the housing association has been centrally involved in delivering the Central Renton Regeneration Strategy, aimed at transforming the commercial and social heart of the village.

Joyce Findlay is perhaps typical of many Cordale tenants. She moved into the village nine years ago; a single parent at a very low ebb, looking for a place to live. The Carmen Social Enterprise Centre encouraged her to take a One Plus assertiveness course – now she is a receptionist in Renton's Integrated Healthy Living Centre, her home has been modernised and her future looks secure.

“Back Street, where I live, was previously the most unpopular street in Renton. I used to be scared to walk through the village, but I wouldn't live anywhere else now. I love the community spirit here; I've never felt like an outsider.”

Joyce Findlay, Cordale Housing Association tenant

A recent performance evaluation suggested that, with its local partners, Cordale helped create more than 150 local jobs between 2001 and 2006. Its Employment Ladder initiative provides skills and opportunities in the association for school leavers who might otherwise struggle in the jobs market. Now it is intending to put together an innovative Public Community Partnership to build a new primary school.

“We don’t just talk about local economic development, social enterprise and business development – we do it and have been very successful. I believe that Cordale is an example for other housing associations in Scotland.”

Stephen Gibson, Director, Cordale Housing Association

These outcomes are certainly impressive, but are not in themselves unique in Scotland. There are other housing associations with a track record of supporting local economic and social investment initiatives. The real story behind the facts and figures here is about how a down-at-heel community has genuinely empowered itself.

Wherever you go in Renton these days, you find people with a real pride that the transformation of the place has been achieved by their own community. There is a sense of togetherness which was not present a few years ago. Whilst Cordale has successfully grown the local asset base through its development programme, it is local people who have proved to be the real assets.

Leadership has been important. Although many people have made important contributions, the transformation of Renton owes much to the imagination, drive and determination of a small number of individuals, particularly Archie Thomson, who was born and bred in the village, chairs Cordale’s Board and helps a group of teenagers run the local youth centre. Importantly, community leadership is now firmly embedded in the local culture, not least amongst young people, most of whom have a strong commitment to staying in Renton.

Ma Centre is a large youth building, formerly owned by the Council but now firmly in the hands of Renton Community Development Trust and particularly the many young people who use it.

“Eight teenagers run the centre. It’s open every day. Louise is the oldest. She gets paid and the rest of us are volunteers. We take bookings for all the activities, staff the café and keep an eye on everything. Archie sorts out any problems, but we don’t get many.”

Macca (15), Renton Youth Group

Empowered young people are the future of any community. In Renton, the succession strategy is already in place.



Renton Youth Group members January 2009

CASE STUDIES:

SOWING SEEDS FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN
DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY



Tenants and residents associations (TARAs) can play an important role in empowering local communities, particularly where they are well-organised, inclusive and determined to find practical solutions to local problems. In Dumfries and Galloway, 13 of them are spread across this large, mainly rural part of the country. Some of them are very active, with an impressive track record of empowering their communities. They are supported by Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership's Community Involvement team.

The Housing Partnership is the second largest housing association in Scotland, with 10,500 homes. It was set up in 2003 to take on the local authority's housing stock, following a successful tenant's ballot.

Dryfe TARA in Lockerbie has been one of its most successful community initiatives. Chaired by an 18 year old for the past two years, a core group of committed residents has focused on play provision. With support from the Housing Partnership, they decided on a practical, hands-on approach to meeting a specific local community need. As a result they have now become an influential body across the whole town.

“When the Council made a decision to dismantle the original play equipment in King Edward Park five years ago, the local community began work to get it reinstated. We consulted everyone here, we visited the Alness Initiative in the Highlands, to see how they'd done it, we raised all the £40,000 required and we helped design it. But the best thing is that the kids really do look after it. They have a real sense of ownership.”

Ronald Richie, Dryfe Tenants and Residents Association, Lockerbie



Dryfe TARA members with DGHP's Community Involvement Manager (lower right)

Despite the TARA's obvious success and the high level of commitment from six-eight local residents, spreading the community empowerment message still poses a significant challenge.

“There are 2,000 households in Lockerbie and we have just 30 members on our mailing list – most people still think we only represent Partnership tenants. We haven't been included in community planning consultations and weren't even consulted on planning proposals for a 40 home development in our core area, so there is still plenty of work to be done!”

Angela Brydson, Dryfe Tenants and Residents Association, Lockerbie

The Housing Partnership has always placed tenants at the heart of its governance arrangements; seven of the association's fifteen board members are tenants, including the chair. Four District Management Committees are exclusively tenant-run; they are used mainly as a sounding board by the association, but also make decisions on distributing a £50,000 a year Community Pride Fund which supports a wide range of community-led initiatives, including the Dryfe project.

The Housing Partnership is currently leading two of the largest housing regeneration programmes in Scotland – in Stranraer and Dumfries. With funding support from the Scottish Government, it has leased a redundant factory in Stranraer, provided more than 60 construction training places and created 28 local jobs in the industry, many of them for its own tenants.

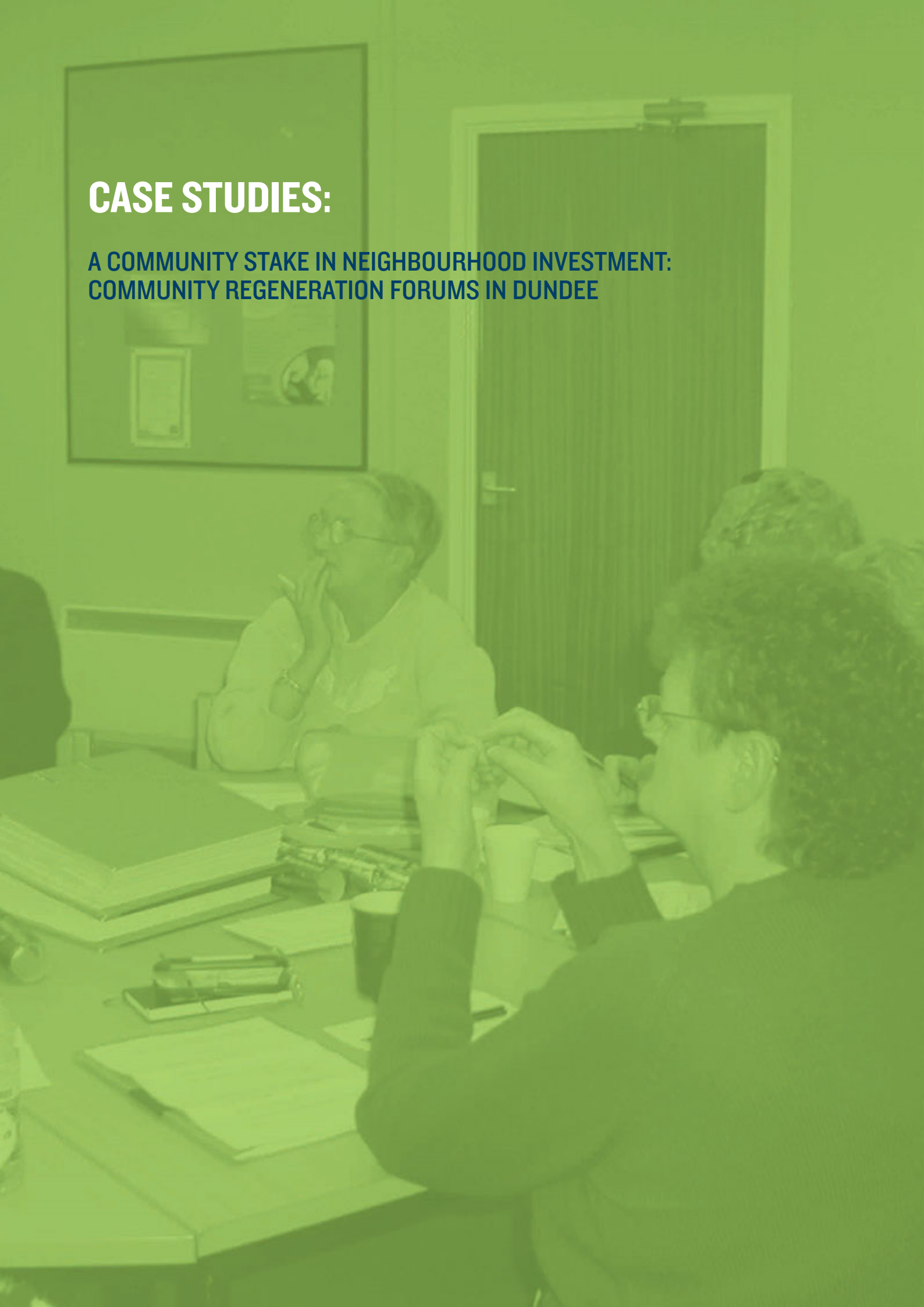
But it is still early days. Less than 1% of the Partnership's turnover is currently invested in Wider Action initiatives; community empowerment is an aspiration, but not yet a corporate priority.

“We do not have a clear strategy for community empowerment yet; our focus has been on involvement and participation, particularly with our tenants. Governance and investment have dominated our first five years as a new association. Now we are a more stable and mature organisation, community empowerment will be a key priority for the next five years.”

Zoe Forster, Chief Executive, Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership

CASE STUDIES:

A COMMUNITY STAKE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD INVESTMENT: COMMUNITY REGENERATION FORUMS IN DUNDEE



“Communities stand up and fight for their areas now, because they can see things being done when they do. They have a voice... it’s empowering.”

Alice Bovill, North West Community Regeneration Forum

Dundee’s five Community Regeneration Forums began life in 2004, following the winding up of the Social Inclusion Partnerships. From the start they were charged with ‘placing communities at the heart of regeneration’. Sponsored by the Dundee Partnership, and supported by regeneration staff from the City Council, they have brought together 75 active residents living in the more deprived neighbourhoods of the City. All five Forums have resident chairs.

Forum members are elected locally in an open democratic process. Everyone stands down at the year end and in practice a quarter of each forum regularly comprises new elected members. This helps to both maintain continuity and keep the Forums regularly refreshed.

“The election process means that most people know who the Forum chairs are, can approach them for help and, if necessary, hold them to account. This is very positive and quite a change from the way things used to be done here.”

Wilma Duncan, Central Community Regeneration Forum

The Forums are there to take an overview of regeneration in their patches and ensure that local communities are engaged in the process. They report to the Dundee Partnership Building Stronger Communities group, with their funding decided by the City Council. They have received between £200,000 and £400,000 each year for projects which meet both City-wide community planning targets and more local priorities. They also oversee a small grants fund for local groups and projects.

“In practice, as long as projects reflect local priorities and are in line with the broad aims of the Community Plan, they will normally be approved by the City Council, unless there are difficult technical and legal issues involved but this would be an exception.”

Stuart Fairweather, Communities Officer, Dundee City Council

The last four years has seen funding made available for around 80 local projects of all shapes and sizes, although the current emphasis is on physical change. Work with young people has been a particular priority, as has investment in local open spaces and the street environment. Policing too has been a success story, with the Forums initially funding a new dedicated community policing team. Tayside Police have now taken over the long term funding of these posts and have provided guarantees that they will remain focused on the five neighbourhoods.

With ring-fencing of the Fairer Scotland Fund coming to an end in March 2010, many of the Forum chairs are concerned about their future.

“Having access to funding has been very important – it has enabled us to find practical solutions to community priorities; we certainly wouldn’t want to lose our seat around the decision-making table”.

Murray Webster, Central Community Regeneration Forum

The five forums meet quarterly at ‘The Gathering’ – a valuable opportunity to share news, ideas, lessons and good practice. Members have visited community regeneration projects elsewhere in Scotland, to share their experiences and learn from others.

Being a Forum member has certainly been empowering for the individuals involved. How far this has led to broader community empowerment in the five neighbourhoods remains an open question. Each Forum is responsible for ensuring its wider community is informed, consulted or engaged. Individual chairs make themselves as widely known as possible, circulate newsletters with feedback forms and door knock when new projects are being considered.

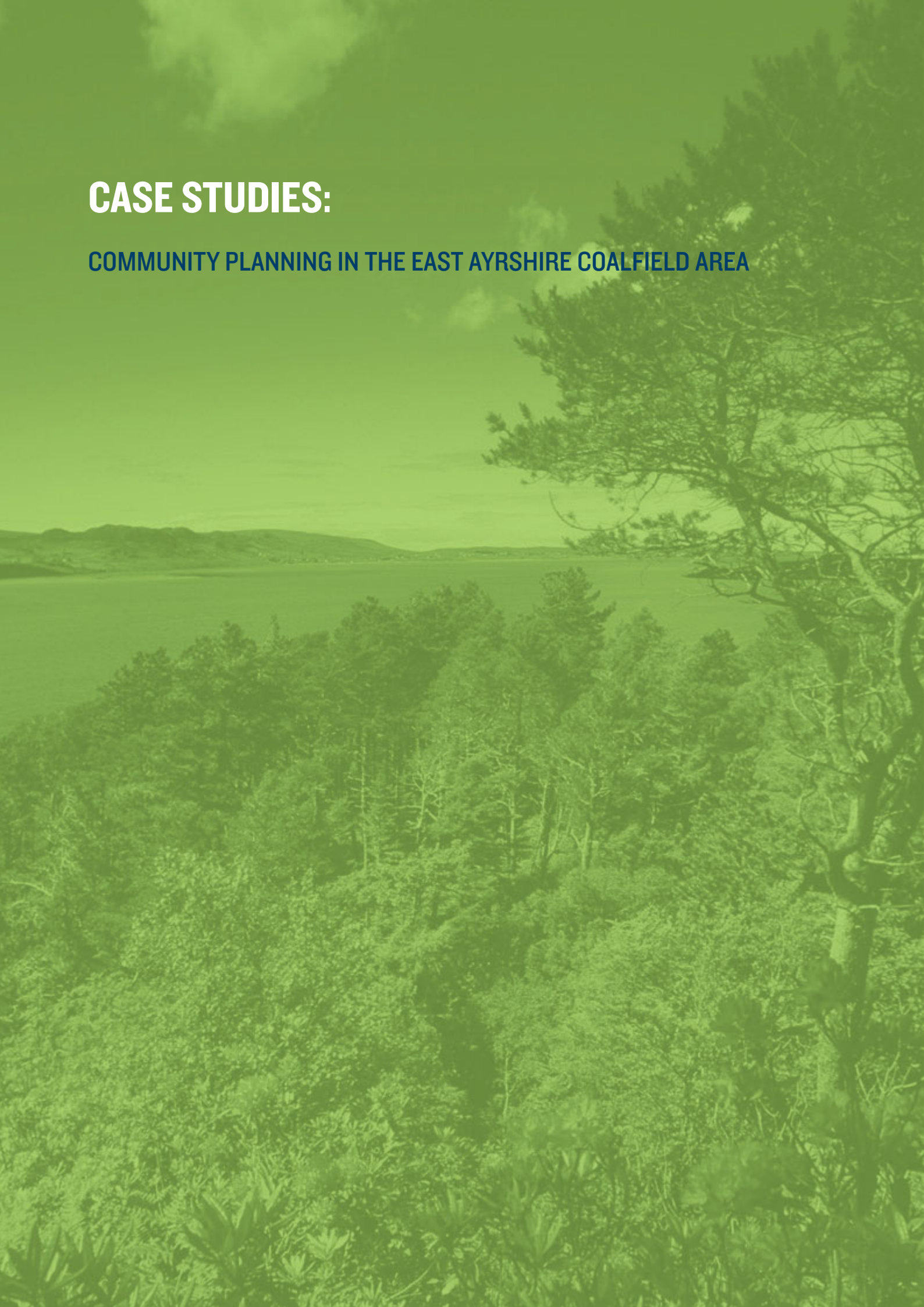
Many formerly frustrated and disillusioned residents are now working together to transform their neighbourhoods and help make Dundee a better place to live. It has been a big step forward for the City and one that Forum members are keen to stick with.



A typical North East Dundee Community Regeneration Forum meeting

CASE STUDIES:

COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE EAST AYRSHIRE COALFIELD AREA



The south of East Ayrshire has a rich mining history, but in common with all of Scotland's former coalfields, the demise of the industry has left a legacy of unemployment and isolation. Although some open-cast mining remains, local jobs are scarce. The villages and small towns of the Coalfield Area have their own identities and needs but all are linked by their mining past.

Local people are understandably keen to maintain interest in the area's coal mining heritage, particularly among younger people. During 2007, 18 primary schools came together to stage productions of 'The Price of Coal' – a full-length concert telling the story of coal mining in the area. There was enormous community support for the productions, with funding coming from the Community Planning Partnership and the Cumnock and Doon Valley Minerals Trust. Many children were prompted to research their mining heritage.

These productions were the brainchild of the Coalfield Communities Federation, a community-led organisation, set up ten years ago to give local people a bigger voice in planning their future.

“The closure of the pits was a devastating blow. The last one closed here in 1989, more than 30 years after 17 miners were killed in an explosion at Kames Colliery in Muirkirk. The Federation has brought people together and found some practical solutions to community problems. It has not been an easy road, but it's been hugely successful; we now have a lot of respect.”

Ian Smith, Chairperson, Coalfield Communities Federation

The Coalfield Communities Federation counts community councils, communities of interest and individuals among its membership. It has sponsored a wide range of community initiatives, including Coalfield Community Transport, a nationally recognised community transport scheme, a community newspaper, a school arts programme and environmental improvements in some villages.

In 2000 a People's Jury, funded and supported by East Ayrshire Coalfield Area Social Inclusion Partnership, looked at how the coalfield communities could play a more active role. Infrequent, inaccessible and expensive public transport emerged as a major issue.



Two years later, Coalfield Community Transport was born. Set up as a not-for-profit charity, wholly owned by the Federation, the aim was to have a network of yellow buses operating across the Coalfield Area, reducing the isolation of many groups and individuals by providing access to cheap and convenient transport. With nine vehicles now in the fleet, it has been a considerable success. It has now been extended to include a 'Wheels to Work' initiative, making scooters available to unemployed people without transport to their work or education.

The Price of Coal production at Cumnock Academy 2007



Community Transport in action January 2009

“We have a whole generation of older people who have been trapped in their homes with many never having been to Ayr, just 16 miles away. Our young people also have problems getting about. Even now, we still have young people who have never been outside the Coalfield area. But the minibuses have changed all that.”

Ian Smith, Chairperson, Coalfield Communities Federation

The Federation is an integral part of East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, with a representative on its Board, funding for its operation and some of its projects; and support from the Council’s Community Planning and Partnership Unit. The Federation plays a key role in the planning and delivery of the Local Community Planning Forum, covering the Coalfield Area.

“The communities in the south of East Ayrshire have always been very active. However, the Coalfield Communities Federation has brought communities together and allowed them to develop a shared understanding of the issues and priorities for the Coalfield Area as a whole and for East Ayrshire in general. The Federation also ensures that the community is fully engaged in our Community Planning process.”

Councillor Douglas Reid, Chair of East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership

The Federation is now working towards expanding its activities, increasing its staff and broadening its funding base. It is particularly keen to initiate some much-needed, large scale environmental projects in its core communities.

CASE STUDIES:

COMMUNITY COUNCILS TAKE THE LEAD IN EAST LoTHIAN



“East Lothian is an example of good practice for community councils in Scotland. Politically and culturally, they have always been seen here as an essential part of the way the local authority goes about its business.”

Lilian Pryde, Community Council Liaison Officer, East Lothian Council

East Lothian’s 20 Community Councils cover a mix of busy market towns and more peaceful rural villages. The best of them are run by a full complement of elected local residents; they work hard to be inclusive; they give equal weight to setting their own local agendas for change and reacting to external proposals. They initiate their own local projects and the volunteers who run them are often regarded as champions of their local communities.

The relationship between East Lothian Council and this extensive network of community councils is positive; significant resources have been provided, whilst the track record of election rather than appointment gives community councillors a democratic legitimacy which is not always found elsewhere. Community councils have done much to empower local people in East Lothian, giving them a voice and delivering real change.

Community councils look after their own patches, but also come together to look at strategic issues in East Lothian, meeting once a month and co-ordinating responses to cross-boundary development and service delivery proposals.

Many of the Community Councils have been particularly proactive in their own areas. Dunpender Community Council has drawn up its own community plan, which it reviews every year, and has recently extended the John Muir Way footpath. Haddington Community Council has established a Pathways Network, helped refurbish the Corn Exchange building and developed a visitor centre. Both place a strong emphasis on local publicity and information and have been a major driving force for change in their communities.



East Lothian Community Council representatives January 2009

“Everywhere you look in Haddington you can see something that the Community Council has done.”

Jan Wilson, MBE, Chair, Haddington Community Council

In Garvald and Morham, the Community Council was faced with people moving out of the area because of poor telecommunication reception. They were unable to get broadband, but instead of campaigning, they set up their own highly successful broadband company in 2005. It was funded jointly through the East Lothian’s Local Priorities Scheme and the Tyne Esk Leader Plus European programme.

East Lothian Council has provided most of the funds for these and many other initiatives. It currently invests £250,000 a year to help community councils run their operations and meet local community priorities. In addition to a basic administration grant, a unique Local Priorities Scheme currently distributes around £150,000 a year to them on a ‘per capita’ basis, whilst a competitive Capital Improvement Grant programme used £100,000 of public money to attract more than £800,000 of matched funding in 2007/08.

The close ties with the local authority are seen as both empowering and mutually beneficial. The Community Councils here decide their own local priorities, but the local authority manages their budgets and expects them to use Council departments to help them deliver most of their projects. This eases any potential strain on volunteers, but also serves to protect the local authority’s interests. It is, however, an arrangement that seems to work well for both sides.

“I feel the relationship between our Community Council and the local authority works well – I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Judith Priest, Chair, Dunpender Community Council

In East Lothian, Community Councils are making a real difference – giving ordinary folk a degree of control over what happens in their towns and villages.

CASE STUDIES:

COMMUNITY BUY-OUT ON THE ISLE OF GIGHA



“Community ownership of the island has been a great success. It is so second nature to people here now, they sometimes have to be reminded that it has actually happened.”

Susan Allan, Chair, Gigha Heritage Trust

Gigha sits between the Kintyre peninsular and Islay in south west Scotland. Its 3,500 acres support a community of 156 people. Change came to the island when local laird Derek Holt put it up for sale in 2001.

Undaunted by the near £4 million asking price and with backing from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Land Fund and their MSP, the islanders decided to make a bid. They called a public meeting in the local village hall and, after a lengthy debate and a vote, the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust was born.

The community buy-out was a big step and not for the faint-hearted. Two members of the community paid a visit to the island of Eigg to find out how it had been done there; they came back inspired.

Much hard work by the islanders brought its rewards in March 2002 when transfer to the Trust was completed. £3.5m had been raised from the Scottish Land Fund with the balance coming from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Both grants were the biggest ever awarded at that time for such a venture. However, there was a catch; £1m of the Scottish Land Fund grant had to be repaid within two years, something which the Trust achieved on time by selling the former Laird's house, fund-raising on the island and developing new community businesses.

The Trust has seven board members, all elected by its 96 community members – 80% of the island's adult population. Community participation in the Trust and its development has been one of the keys to its success. Everyone feels they have a voice; no-one feels excluded.

“Gigha was like a ship in the doldrums, but then the sails started moving. We've hit a few rocks on the way, but now the trade winds are blowing and we're getting there.”

John Martin, Director, Gigha Heritage Trust



Wind energy is an important element in the Trust's financial viability. Gigha Renewable Energy runs three wind turbines at the south end of the island. They generate around £100,000 of income every year for the Trust, through sales to the grid. A second wholly-owned community business, Gigha Trading, looks after the hotel, the few self-catering cottages and the quarry. The hotel is the island's largest employer.

The 'Dancing Ladies' wind farm,
Isle of Gigha February 2009



Afternoon tea in the community run village hall
February 2009

A key issue for the islanders since the Trust's beginning has been housing. With most island homes below the Tolerable Standard, there has been a big push to improve conditions and provide new affordable homes, to meet local needs and encourage people to stay on the island. The Trust now has a housing plan, supported by the Scottish Government, which has already seen 18 new homes for rent built by local housing association Fyne Homes. A major refurbishment programme of its own stock is also well underway. The plan appears to be working – the island's population is increasing.

Gigha is a small island and it is not surprising that everyday social and community activities are widely seen as important. Recent innovations have included a music festival and a village pantomime. Five-a-side-football, keep-fit, carpet bowls, afternoon tea and a drama group are regular activities in the village hall.

For some islanders, the change has been more about a new sense of freedom and empowerment. 'Saorsa' (Gaelic for 'freedom') is the name given to the new community boat which will soon be used for pleasure trips and training programmes for young people. All the changes have not, however, been without their difficulties. Balancing the Trust's books is a constant headache and there have been some inevitable community tensions.

"It was a big thing for everyone because it was a major change, but the buy-out itself was the easy bit. There is nothing more difficult than trying to please a whole community."

Willie McSporran, MBE, former Chair, Gigha Heritage Trust

Overall, however, the community buy-out is seen as a great success. Physical conditions are improving, virtually full employment has now been achieved, the population is increasing and now includes more children and young people, and there is a great deal of volunteering and community activity. Confidence in Gigha's future is increasing. This is an island community in control of its own destiny.

CASE STUDIES:

TENANT- LED ESTATE INVESTMENT IN NORTH AYRSHIRE



“We know what needs doing on our estates and now the Council are listening and responding. Before the Estate Based Project, we just got the basics done and had no say. Now real change has taken place and we decide how the money is spent. It works – no question.”

Alex Younger, Fullarton Tenants Association, North Ayrshire

North Ayrshire Council launched its Estate Based Project three years ago. Its aim is to radically change the way investment in estates is decided, giving tenants some control for the first time. Changing the balance of Council investment from essential repairs to longer term improvements is also an important objective. The hope is that tenant involvement in decisions about estate investment will improve the sustainability of their neighbourhoods and encourage a sense of ownership.

Most of the physical improvements involve new fencing, paving and security – work on individual homes is not eligible for Estate Based Project funding. The outcomes so far are encouraging. Problems with vandalism and particularly graffiti have reduced significantly since the project began. People are taking more care of their neighbourhoods and it shows.

North Ayrshire has 16 active tenants groups; 13 of them are Registered Tenant’s Organisations, giving them a recognised role in the Council’s decision-making process. Although some estates are unrepresented, the annual Estate Based Project budget of £2.5m is divided between all the Council’s estates.

The project is advertised annually through the Tenancy Matters newsletter and gives all tenants in North Ayrshire the opportunity to submit proposals for their area. In addition, estate walkabouts are carried out and tenant’s priorities are discussed and agreed for the following year. Tenants work closely with the Council’s technical team to plan and design each project together. The tenants association then bids for a share of the available funds against an agreed set of criteria, with the Council making the final decisions.



North Ayrshire tenant representatives discuss the Estate Based Project January 2009

“The size of the budget was always bound to make a difference. It motivates people to get involved. They realise we’ve put a lot of money into it and that we are serious about it working.”

Carol Barton, Divisional Manager, Housing Services, North Ayrshire Council

If the project has a downside it is the difficulties of engaging with owners who have bought their homes from the Council. Fencing schemes, in particular, often exclude these properties because some owners are not prepared to pay their share of the costs.

Yonderton Place in West Kilbride is a typical successful scheme. Some elderly tenants living here were struggling to maintain their front gardens; they were not fenced off, people were using them as a short cut and the grass was difficult to cut. The tenants decided that they would like a fence put round their gardens and the grass replaced with ‘street print’ – printed and textured tarmac made to look like paving and requiring no upkeep. They worked with the Council’s technical team to put a proposal together.

Moves are now afoot to bring North Ayrshire’s tenants associations together in a new network, opening up the prospect of a more strategic and empowering role for tenants in the Estate Based Project and the Council’s investment plans.



West Kilbride's Yonderton Place Estate Based Project
January 2009

CASE STUDIES:

COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOUR IN THE ORKNEY ISLANDS



“The Community Councils here were set up to create empowerment and are held in high regard by the local authority. They are based on mutual respect and is completely non-political. There is a real sense of collective endeavour; people know we all have to work together to bring about change here.”

James Stockan, Vice-Convenor, Orkney Islands Council

The Orkney Islands lie just 20 miles from the northern mainland. With a declining and ageing population, Orcadians are only too aware of the need to work together to nurture their three greatest income sources – farming, fishing and tourism.

There are 20 very active Community Councils spread across these islands, with around 150 of the 20,000 population directly involved as councillors. Many of them have supported the establishment of ten local development trusts, to take on important island assets, secure funds for their modernisation or run local services for direct community benefit.

Together, they are involved in a wide variety of initiatives, including tourism, heritage, catering, inter-island transport and even a private water supply.

The green and fertile island of Shapinsay is just 6 miles long, linked by car ferry to Mainland. The old Smithy is a listed building, owned by Orkney Islands Council and leased to the island's community council. Formerly a rather damp and forbidding building, it was refurbished by the local Heritage Trust in 2004 and has now been brought back to life as a major visitor attraction. The bulk of the £200,000 cost was secured from Orkney Islands Council's Community Development Fund for the New Millennium, Heritage Lottery, Orkney Enterprise and the Manifold Trust.



Sheila Garson, Chair Shapinsay Development Trust,
Maureen Spence, Community Council Liaison Team Leader,
OIC, Danny Marcus, Vice Chair Westray Community Council,
James Stockton, Vice-Convenor, OIC.

The Community Council was the initial driving force behind the project, helping establish the Heritage Trust on the island, providing some pump-priming funding and enabling it to attract more extensive charitable and public funds for the renovation work.

“Our heritage is what gives us our identity and a place in our community – it is well worth protecting. The Smithy is an important community asset, but it wouldn’t be without a close working relationship between the Community Council and the Heritage Trust.”

Sheila Garson, Community Councillor, Shapinsay, and Chair, Shapinsay Heritage Trust

There is an interdependence between the local authority and the community councils in the Orkney Islands. The community councils act as a vital ‘sounding board’ for Orkney Islands Council; few decisions affecting any island are made by the local authority without community council support. It’s a balanced relationship which empowers the island communities and ensures they have a strong voice in their own affairs.

Papa Westray is one of the smallest and most northerly islands in the archipelago, with a population of just 70. Nevertheless, it has its own Community Council and a separate Development Trust, working alongside a Community Association and Community Co-operative. Few adult members of the community are not involved in some way.

The Community Council provides the vital link between these community organisations and Orkney Islands Council, leading on some things, funding and supporting others.

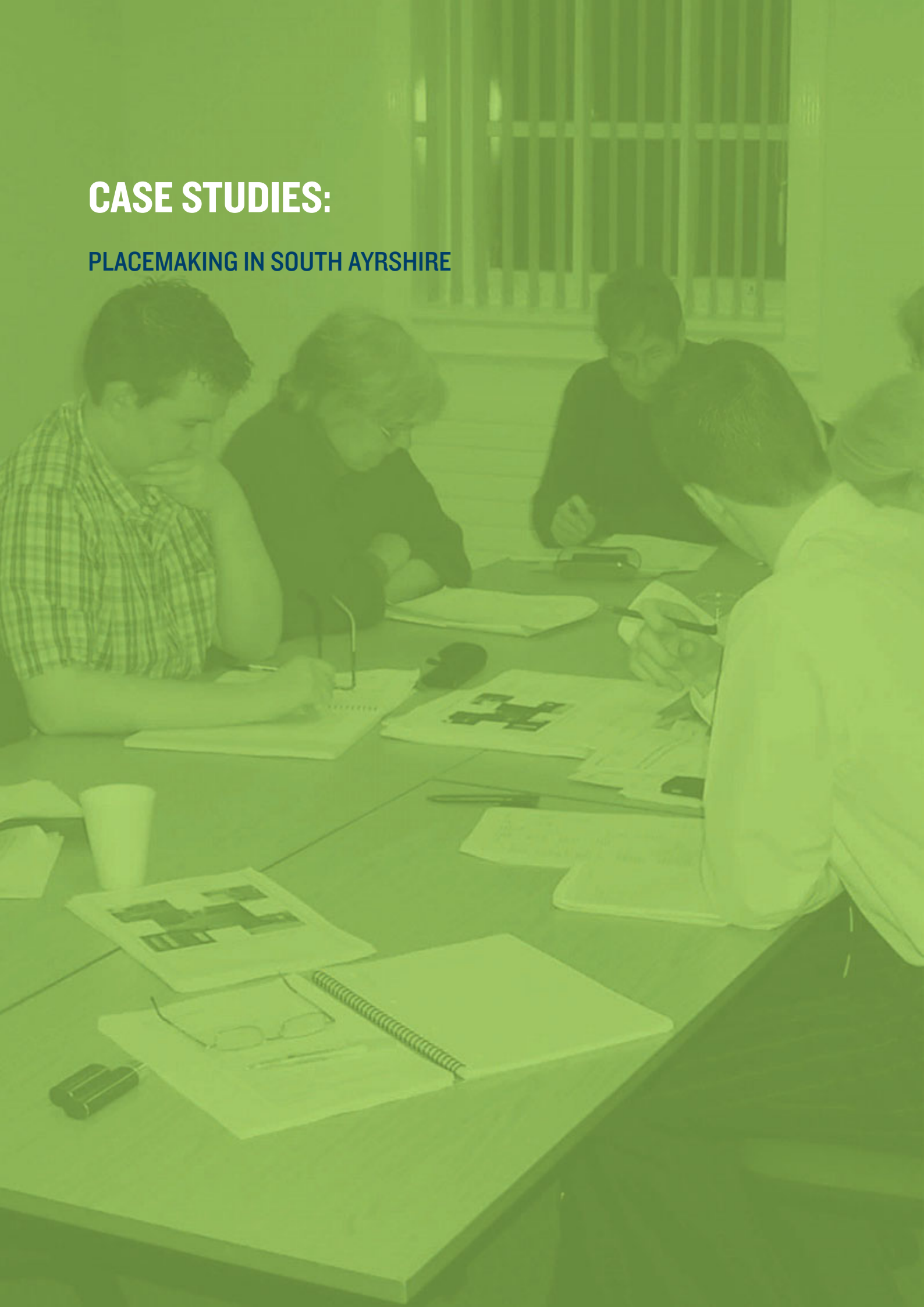
“As community councillors, we do most of the spade work and the complaining on the island; it usually takes quite a time to get things changed. The work is not always exciting, but somebody has to do it and we make sure it’s done!”

Neil Rendall, Papa Westray Community Council

The Orcadian community councils certainly have a strong track record when it comes to getting things done, but it is their inclusiveness and their close relationship with Orkney Islands Council that stand out. They are, in many ways, the glue which holds these remote island communities together.

CASE STUDIES:

PLACEMAKING IN SOUTH AYRSHIRE



“Placemaking is light years away from some of the regeneration schemes of the past, when proposals were just presented to communities for their information.”

David Sherlock, Regeneration Manager, South Ayrshire Council

Placemaking Scotland is a partnership between Greenspace Scotland and Project for Public Spaces (PPS) – a New York-based non-profit organisation. It is a participative approach to physical change which aims to transform uninspiring public spaces into vibrant places at the heart of a neighbourhood.

The Placemaking process involves a series of observations, interviews, surveys, photography and workshops involving both community members and stakeholders. Workshops are used to look at, listen to and ask questions of people in a particular space, in order to discover their needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision for that place. The vision can evolve quickly into an implementation strategy, beginning with small scale, do-able improvements that can immediately bring benefits to spaces and the people who use them.

In South Ayrshire, the Council recognised that successful public spaces are lively, secure and distinctive places that function for the people who use them. It called an initial public meeting for people interested in the relationship between regeneration and the environment, to test out whether there was interest in setting up Placemaking groups. This led to three groups being established – in Girvan, Lochside and Tarbolton.

Placemaking offers benefits far beyond making better spaces for people with bridge building, youth engagement, economic and community development, capacity building and the establishment of community identity.

All three Placemaking projects are different, but each follows the same participation techniques and key principles:

- Community empowerment that is early and continuous is at the heart of each project, and as a result ownership of the changes and the process is being achieved
- By providing ‘quick wins’ communities see a difference being made quickly and interest and involvement is sustained
- ‘Testing out’ ideas means that longer term changes will be more sustainable
- Involving the widest group of stakeholders – community, council and local agencies – from the start, has ensured that the long term visions are shared, achievable, and have the commitment from both those who will benefit, and those who will help deliver them
- Focusing on the positive aspects of all three areas, through the Place Evaluation process, has provided a strong basis for engagement and partnership working with the community from the outset.



Tarbolton village

Tarbolton is a small ex-mining village in the South Ayrshire countryside. The lack of resources to manage a range of the formal and informal public spaces in the village meant they were often in a poor condition, giving a ‘run-down’ impression, providing little visual amenity or active use for villagers or visitors.

Placemaking in Tarbolton has brought together the community and local stakeholders to create a vibrant heart to the village by tackling a series of civic and community spaces and focal points in its centre, including a disused village square, war memorial and village entrance. With 30 stakeholders involved in initial placemaking workshops, consultation quickly expanded to include contributions and input from over 200 local people.

The community very quickly took ownership of the process here, delivering many of the quick wins themselves; cleaning entrance signs and painting railings. Following work on a longer term vision for Tarbolton, the community has led the way in raising funds for the redevelopment of key public spaces.

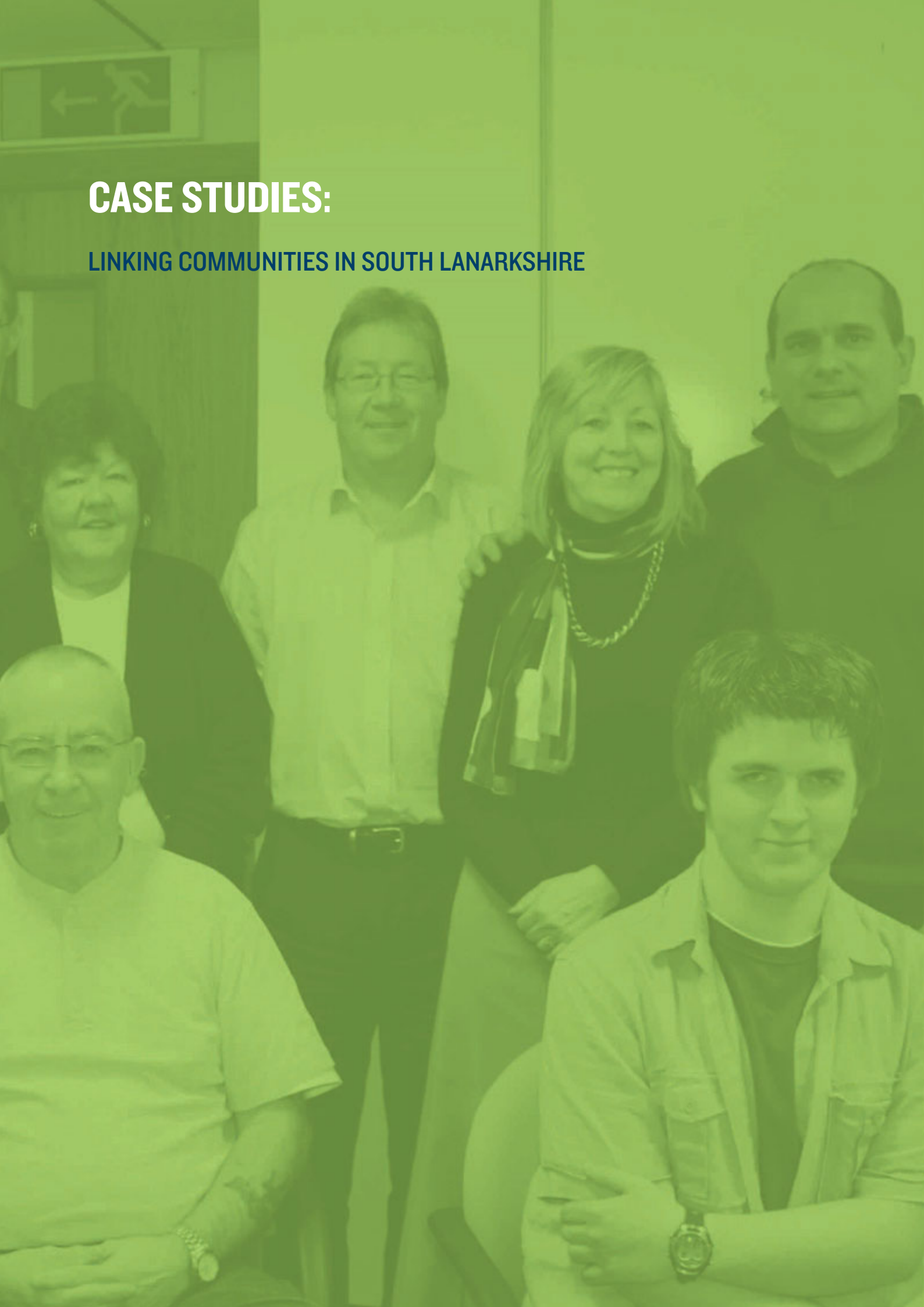
“People really took the idea to their hearts and now, volunteers rather than the Council are leading on the redevelopment of the area.”

David Burns, Housing Manager

Community groups have also had an important role in moving the Place Making process forward at Girvan and are shaping public space at a new housing development in Lochside, Ayr.

CASE STUDIES:

LINKING COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH LANARKSHIRE



“Trust, transparency, hard work and partnership are what we’re all about.”

Bobby McKean, Community Links Chair, and Representative for Blantyre

Community Links began life seven years ago when community representatives from four neighbourhoods in the former Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) area in Hamilton and Blantyre joined forces to set up their own support organisation. It was very much needed.

“Before we set up Community Links, all four communities were working against each other; we wouldn’t even sit together in the same room; nobody trusted anyone. Then, having set up the company, some people thought we were in the Council’s pocket. At the community meetings I was getting comments from people who just would not believe change could happen, but I didn’t care – I was there for the people who did believe. We dealt with it by getting out onto the streets and talking to people. Now they are completely behind us.”

Jack Ferguson, Community Links Board Representative for Burnbank

The charitable, community-controlled company certainly has a strong working relationship with both Changing Places – the successor body to the local SIP – and with South Lanarkshire Council. Much of its funding comes through a Service Level Agreement with the former. Its independent status has, however, enabled it attract funds from the Big Lottery and the Community Voices, Community Regeneration and Voluntary Action Funds.



Community Links Board members and staff
January 2009

Whitehill was one of the communities involved from the start.

“I got involved with the SIP and helped to set up Community Links as my neighbourhood was going downhill rapidly. I was voted onto the Board by the Whitehill community to represent our area. We worked hard to turn things round, involve rarely heard groups in Open Mind Events and listen to what people wanted. We’ve worked closely with the Council and it’s paid off. Whitehill has been completely transformed, physically and socially. There is a new community spirit here; we’ve taken ownership of the area.”

Anna Shanks, Community Links Board Representative for Whitehill

Community Links’ work earned national recognition from the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) in 2007 and the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) in 2006, both reflecting its strong emphasis on volunteering.

The organisation recruits and trains a growing network of community volunteers. 41 of them help produce and distribute Your Community Matters, a quarterly community newspaper, to 45,000 homes, as well as supporting events and other engagement work.

Another 33 volunteers are delivering an Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Buddy project, providing recycled home computers, training and support for nearly 1,000 people so far. It is a project that appeals particularly to young men, many of whom have faced difficulties finding a job or gaining a qualification, often due to ill health. Community Links provides the training and support for these volunteers. Some of them have broadened their interest to become actively involved in their own communities.

“I was out of work for three years on long-term sick and came to Community Links for ICT training. They helped build up my confidence over a couple of months, which helped me get a full time job in the IT field, and I’ve now been voted onto their Board as a community rep.”

Russell Bennett, ICT, Buddy Volunteer and Community Links Board Member for Blantyre

Ever conscious of the need for financial stability, Community Links is now providing consultancy services to other sectors, particularly health and is also looking at turning its ICT Buddy project into a social enterprise.



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