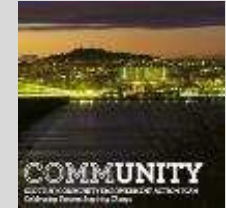


In our own words

The story behind examples of community empowerment in Scotland



In March 2009, the Scottish Government launched its **Community Empowerment Action Plan**. Prepared with the active involvement of the Confederation for Scottish Local Authorities, it is a key plank in the Government's determination to achieve a more successful Scotland. The Action Plan also takes into account the views of nearly 380 people across Scotland who entered into a dialogue with the Government about the nature of community empowerment, in late 2007.



What is community empowerment?

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. It is about people taking collective action to make change happen on their own terms.

Communities can be empowered in many different ways. There is no one model and no road map of how to get there. Only communities themselves can decide how much empowerment they want and how to achieve it. For most, it is a journey, not a one-off event.

All community empowerment organisations are open and inclusive; they place a strong emphasis on equality and diversity and on building their capacity to do things; they usually work with supportive partners; they always work for the benefit of their community.

About the case studies

The Government is keen to celebrate existing examples of community empowerment across the country. The hope is that other communities will develop the confidence and ambition to do something similar.













For many communities, becoming empowered may seem to be a daunting task and one which may be beyond their capacity. Seeing and hearing how others in a similar situation have overcome these hurdles can open people's eyes and broaden their horizons. That is the purpose of this report.

The twelve case studies highlighted here represent a small cross section of many hundreds of community empowerment initiatives currently underway across Scotland. They show a range of models that can be empowering. They involve communities owning assets and people playing a key role in influencing decisions about how public money is spent. They include several types of community organisation, including community councils, registered tenants organisations, community based housing associations and community businesses.

All the examples focus on telling people's stories from their own perspective. Together they offer a powerful insight into how people can get together to do things for themselves and change their communities for the better.

All twelve organisations are interested in helping others learn from their experience; you can find details about how to contact them in this report.

The case studies and where to find them

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Transforming a small town – community
volunteering in Alness, Ross-shire

Who we are and what we do



The Alness Initiative is a not-for-profit organisation, with community and business interests working together in partnership and on a voluntary basis. We are committed to transforming our small East Rosshire town to make it a more attractive, healthy, caring and successful place in which to live and work. With 13 years experience under our belts, we have already made a big difference in our community.

How we got going

There has always been a strong tradition of voluntary action in Alness; our active Community Association has a sixty year history. Our 'can-do' attitude was put to the test when the area's major employer, the nearby aluminium smelter, closed in the mid 1980's. Alness was faced with 25% unemployment and the unenviable reputation as one of the 10% most deprived communities in Scotland.

In 1995, the Business Association got together with the local Community Association and the Community Council to set up the Alness Initiative. With the backing of the local Council and Ross and Cromarty Enterprise, we raised funds for a series of initiatives. Top of our shopping list was giving the High Street a facelift and bringing it back to life. The national recognition this received, gave us the impetus for further work to improve the town.

We knew that if people were able to shop in an attractive and safe environment, they would spend money locally. That has proved to be the case; our High Street is now doing well, even in these difficult times.



How we organise ourselves

The Alness Initiative is run by a voluntary Management Committee. As well as representatives from the founding community organisations, we also have representatives of both older and young people involved, as well as one local councillor.

We buy in expertise as and when it is needed, but much of our work is done by volunteers working long hours for no financial reward. We used to employ our own Development Worker, but we don't currently have any paid staff. We do, however, receive invaluable support from the Council's Ward Manager.

Brian Munro is a local contractor and Business Association representative on the Committee...

"Regardless of whether the Initiative members are community or business representatives, we all work together and have the interests of the town at heart; we all want to get the best for Alness".



Where our funding comes from

The Initiative has very little money of its own. We raise money on a project by project basis, finding funds from a wide range of sources, including the Fairer Scotland Fund and Europe. We have been able to plough back money received from our local wind farms into projects with community benefits and access some of the Council's Ward budget.

One of our key partners, the Alness Community Association, owns land and buildings and employs its own staff. It is a company limited by guarantee that owns the local Heritage Centre. It raised £270,000 for the purchase and refurbishment of the building after it was threatened with demolition. A Heritage Lottery grant and a loan from Charity Bank made important contributions. The Centre publishes a monthly magazine, with subscribers from all over the world, and sells locally produced crafts and other goods.

What we've achieved so far

Our initial aim of making the town a more attractive place has been spectacularly successful. The Environment Group's colourful hanging baskets and flower tubs in the High Street are the most obvious sign of this; but it extends to a series of 'pocket parks' on former waste ground in various parts of the town. There is a sculpture trail, where a walk along the riverside brings you face-to-face with a wolf or a wild boar. The whole town shares a pride in its appearance, the parks are all maintained by local volunteers and there is little vandalism. The town has won four gold medals in Britain in Bloom, beating competition from much larger towns and cities across the UK.



Our commitment to the environment is not simply about appearance. A network of paths and cycleways have made Alness a place where all age groups can enjoy an active, safe and healthy way of life. And the allotments group we supported, in collaboration with the Council, means that families are growing their own food too. Initiative member, Stewart Campbell has a particular interest in health...

"As a retired GP working in the town for 20 years, I'm keen that the people of Alness are able to lead healthy life styles. Initiative fund-raising now means children can walk safely to school, organised groups can enjoy our woodland and riverside walks, and we are part of the national cycleway network".

We have always involved young people in our work. Working closely with the Council's youth service, we make sure that children are involved in our projects. Alness High School was the first school in the Highlands to win a green flag for environmental awareness, and has developed a reputation for healthy eating.

Janette Douglas, who represents youth interests on the Initiative, feels this is the key to long-term success...

"Young people are the future of Alness. It is vital that the projects meet their needs and involve them. Because we work with children from an early age, they really share in the work that is going on, and take a pride in what has been achieved"



What we've achieved so far

We are very aware of the problems faced by low income families, faced with the high cost of heating their homes. With support from Scottish and Southern Energy, we acted as the lead group for a year long project offering practical advice to residents in one of our most disadvantaged areas. The West Alness Save Project (WASP) met its targets for energy savings, providing residents with a real cash benefit, and earning us a cash prize which we will plough back into our work.



The problems we've overcome

We have had to make do without a dedicated development worker over recent months. It is immensely time consuming putting together funding applications, and some of the work we would have liked to take forward has had to be put on the back burner. Thankfully, we are hoping to appoint a new development worker soon.

We have learned that we cannot achieve everything that we would like. We had plans to install a ground-sourced district heating system in one of our housing estates, but found that it was prohibitively expensive to do this with existing homes. But we have learned from the experience; we are now talking to the local housing association about installing this type of heating system in its latest new build development.

Perhaps our biggest hurdle was initial apathy and scepticism. Many people in the town thought that it would be impossible to counter Alness's negative image. But we like to think we have proved the sceptics wrong.

What we've learned



It is all about partnership. The individuals and organisations represented on the Initiative have different perspectives and expertise; we learn from each other. For example, young people were recently invited to do a mural to brighten up an empty shop window on the High Street. Our partnership with the Business Association provides real opportunities for local employment and training.

But above all, we have learned that volunteers in a community can often achieve more than big organisations. We have made the change in Alness. Yes we have been greatly helped by our partners and funders, but in the end it has been down to local people working together with a determination to turn our town round.

What's next for us?



Alness is on the move. A new group has formed and hopes soon to be awarded Transition Town status. This is a community-led initiative which will help reduce our dependency on non-renewable energy and cut the community's carbon emissions.

The Initiative's next big project is the redesign of our riverside park which is owned by the Community Association. It is not well used, mainly because of poor access and drainage problems.

Using European LEADER money and the Fairer Scotland Fund, we have plans to create an adventure cycle route, provide outdoor fitness equipment for adults and young people, manage the woodland properly, reinstate the football pitches, and provide an all-ability footpath. It will then be a park that the whole community can enjoy once again.

We also hope to develop a project which will provide a drop in centre for older people, whilst also providing a training opportunity for local college students as part of their education in social care.

Councillor Carolyn Wilson MBE is an Alness business woman and a local councillor. She chairs the Initiative...

"The Initiative has certainly had its challenges and sometimes we meet delays and frustrations, but we will keep focussed 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. Unlike many meetings I attend, I always leave the Initiative ones with a smile on my face. It's because people here are so positive".



Want to find out more?

We are always pleased to talk to people about **Alness Initiative**. You can contact us at:

The Heritage Centre

102 High Street

Alness IV17 0SG

Phone 01349 883005

Email alness@alness.com Web www.alness.com

WWW.ALNESS.COM





Partnership and empowerment in Buchan,
Aberdeenshire

Who we are and what we do

Buchan Development Partnership is an independent, community-led initiative working with communities across this largely rural part of Aberdeenshire. Based in the village of Maud, we help groups keep their essential community facilities running and tackle some of the pressing economic, social and environmental issues they face.

We help them develop their projects by setting up meetings, inviting relevant people, discussing funding applications and helping to make things happen. It's a more 'organic' approach than doing things for people, which is the way it used to be done.

Dawn Brodie, our Development Officer, explains the approach...

"Our job is to empower local people to do things for themselves and their communities. We are currently supporting more than 100 groups in Buchan. We empower people by helping them, not telling them what to do...we are always on tap, never on top".



How we got going

We began life as the Buchan Development Initiative, based in Maud and working with four very different projects. These four projects decided to form a partnership, to share their expertise and open up more funding opportunities. This partnership grew arms and legs and evolved into the Buchan Development Partnership in 2000. There was a strong desire at that time to broaden the range of support we could provide to communities across Buchan. This remains one of our main objectives.

How we organise ourselves



Buchan Development Partnership is a limited company and a charity. We currently employ two members of staff to run the Partnership day to day. They are managed by a Board of Directors and a Management Committee elected by the membership from community groups across Buchan.

There are 18 members on our Management Committee, all nominated by community groups, who are invited to nominate them. We also have a smaller board of directors – a condition of our company status - but they don't act independently of our Management Committee. Membership is free and open to any community organisation in Buchan.

Our office in Maud is near the community-led redevelopment project for the old mart site.

Where our funding comes from

Funding is always an issue for support organisations like ours, but we are lucky to have been well supported by Government and European funding programmes over the years. The Partnership currently receives core funding from Aberdeenshire Council through a Service Level Agreement and is also supported by Shell, who fund our Community Forums, quarterly newsletter and a Small Grants Scheme for groups in the area.

We are always on the look out for new sources of funding, but our attention is increasingly focused on how we can generate our own funds by selling our services more widely.

What we've achieved so far

We have been involved in Community Planning since 2001, working with Aberdeenshire's Community Planning Partnership and on the ground with many local groups. It's a two-way support system. They fund us and, in return, we help them achieve their planning targets.

We use Planning for Real©, - a hands-on technique - 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 presentations and expensive exhibitions most communities are confronted with. It encourages 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 – we feel its important to talk to everyone.



Chris White, Area Manager for Aberdeenshire Council works closely with the Development Partnership...

"The Buchan Partnership is an independent friend of the Council, helping us find volunteers for community work or consultation. Our support is non-paternalistic - we don't dictate to them. This works particularly well as it mirrors the approach which the Partnership takes to the communities it works with"

One of our priorities has been 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 our members, a Dial-a-Bus company, an I.T and e-learning training company (BITES) and Maud Village Trust are all up and running as highly successful social enterprises. We want to encourage more of these initiatives.

What we've achieved so far

Maud Village Trust has been a big success for us, but more importantly for the local community; it has brought 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 a wide variety of sources, including Awards for All, the Direct Grants Programme, Forward Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council, Communities Scotland, the Scottish Government through Future Builders and Shell Small Grants.

Pat Buckman is the Trust's secretary...

"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 £2.5 million we needed to make it all happen."

Another important achievement has been working with the Rora Community Committee to bring their village hall back to life. It was the only community facility remaining in this small rural village and had been unused for some time. Redevelopment has brought a new vibrancy and community spirit to the village, not just through the fun events it now hosts, but also through the hard graft and team spirit that the community put into the project. Bob Anderson, one of those directly involved, would take on another village hall project tomorrow...

"Our Christmas 2008 Dance was our first big event and it was a great success – especially the warmth from the new heating system."



The problems we've overcome

A lot of our problems have been funding related so far, which is not an uncommon problem for support organisations such as Buchan Development Partnership. It has been challenging at times for us to deal with the technicalities and details of reporting on complex funding arrangements.

Large funding initiatives can be very difficult for our member groups too - especially when volunteers are having to put a great deal of time and effort into the application process, sometimes to no avail. Our groups have however been incredibly successful at securing funding and support from multiple, smaller sources and particularly through their own efforts - be it through putting in their own labour to a project or organising successful fundraising events.

What we've learned



We carried out a social audit of the Partnership in 2004 and reviewed it in 2006. The audit pointed to shortcomings in our publicity and promotion work and suggested we should keep better records of the grants brought into Buchan by the activities of all our member groups. It was a very valuable process – every organisation needs to look at itself with a fresh pair of eyes on a regular basis.

We have also learned that, despite all the enthusiasm for innovation and new ways of doing things, sometimes the old, simple techniques are the best. Planning for Real© has been around for many years, we use it a lot with communities and it still works.

What's next for us?

Our priorities stay the same for the future – to work together to create a vibrant Buchan through economic, social and environmental change in local communities. However, we would like to become more financially independent as an organisation and rely much less on small pots of funding which make it difficult to plan for the future.

Norma Thomson, who chairs the Partnership, feels this is a top priority...

“One thing I do know is that we need to become more self sufficient financially and less reliant on grants, but that will not happen without a lot of work; nor will it happen overnight”



Want to find out more?

We always welcome interest in our work. Please contact us at:

Buchan Development Partnership
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Aberdeenshire AB42 4ND
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Email: bdp@scotmail.net
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Community planning in the East Ayrshire coalfield area

Who we are and what we do



The Coalfield Communities Federation is a community-led charity, set up 10 years ago to give local people a stronger voice in planning their future. Our part of East Ayrshire has a rich coal mining history, but it has left behind a legacy of unemployment, isolation and a falling population. The Federation exists to bring communities together, help put them back on their feet and give them a better future.

We count community councils, communities of interest and individuals amongst our membership, and we inform and influence the work of the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, with which we have a close working relationship. We run our own projects and employ our own staff.



Ian Smith chairs the Federation and has been involved from the start...

"The closure of the pits was a devastating blow for us. 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 hasn't been an easy road, but we now have a lot of respect"

How we got going

Our Federation owes its origins to the East Ayrshire Coalfield Area Social Inclusion Partnership. Set up to give communities a collective voice, we brought together the 14 community councils and other communities of interest in the area and provided a forum for consultation between them, the wider community and East Ayrshire Council.

In 2000, a People's Jury looked at how the coalfield communities could play a more active role and came up with a list of priorities. In an area of isolated villages, poor public transport emerged as an important issue. So one of our first actions was to set up Coalfield Community Transport as a not-for-profit charity, wholly owned by the Federation. Other initiatives followed on from this success.

How we organise ourselves

The Federation invites representation from each of the areas 14 community councils, together with representatives from other communities of interest, including disability groups, young people and older people. Our meetings are held monthly, and depending on the agenda, we invite other agencies to take part in our discussions.

We employ our own development worker, who is responsible for our current and new initiatives, and a part-time administrator, but much of the work is done by our voluntary Board members, each of whom has overall responsibility for at least one initiative.

How we organise ourselves

Each community brings forward local issues to our annual Development Day, where we discuss and agree priorities. The Action Plan which comes out of this day is then circulated to community councils and represents the agreed work programme for the Federation.

Once a particular interest is agreed, we invite relevant experts and professionals to take part in our discussions, to help us turn our ideas into practical projects. It's a process which works well for us.

Where our funding comes from

Funding for running the Federation and employing our staff currently comes from the Fairer Scotland Fund through the Community Planning Partnership, although this is only guaranteed until 2010. Our funds and how we spend them are subject to quarterly monitoring and annual review.

We also raise funds from a wide variety of other sources for our individual projects. For example, we received Big Lottery funding for our Electronic Picture Postcard project and our work now benefits from a share of the European LEADER fund. We have also raised money from a local Minerals Trust.

What we've achieved so far

Our flagship project, Coalfield Community Transport, operates a fleet of yellow buses across the coalfield area, reducing the isolation of many groups and individuals by providing access to cheap and convenient transport. The buses bring children from remote areas to nurseries, run shopping trips and excursions for senior citizens, and take people to church.

With nine buses now in the fleet and eleven members of staff, it has been a considerable success and has received local and national recognition. Following community consultation, two of the buses are now wheelchair accessible. We have also extended it to include a 'Wheels to Work' initiative, making 20 scooters available to people without transport to their work or place of education.



Ian Smith stresses how important this Federation initiative has been for local communities...

"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."

What we've achieved so far



Our communities are understandably keen to maintain interest in the area's coal mining heritage, particularly amongst schoolchildren. 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. The Federation raised funding from the Community Planning Partnership and the Cumnock and Doon Valley Minerals Trust. Many children were prompted to research their mining heritage. The concert was performed at Muirkirk Primary School on the 50th anniversary of the Kames Colliery disaster in the town.

Sally Whittet, headteacher at Muirkirk Primary School recalls how important it was...

"The Anniversary was a big event for the town, and the play involved the whole community through the involvement of parents and families. For the children, it was chance to learn about and celebrate their heritage, and there was an art competition to tie in with the play. The whole process was facilitated by the Federation."

Other projects which we sponsor include a community newspaper, a schools arts programme and environmental improvements in some villages. We are now working on the compilation of a schedule of derelict buildings in order to support bringing them back into use.

The Federation is an integral part of East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, with a representative sitting on the Partnership Board. Since 2008, we have played a key role in the planning and delivery of the local Community Planning Forum covering the coalfield area, which allows us to influence the planning and decision-making of Community Planning Partners. 6 of our members sit on this and we manage their budget for expenses.

Councillor Douglas Reid chairs the East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership...

"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"



The problems we've overcome

There have always been active communities in our area, but there wasn't always shared thinking. One of the big challenges was to shift the focus away from the problems of individual communities towards shared solutions. The community transport initiative is a great example of how we've managed to do this. It has taken time and has certainly not been easy.

Not all of our projects have worked; we attempted to open an indoor skateboarding facility, but the costs of insurance made the project unworkable. The important thing is to learn from these problems and then move on.

What we've learned

We always knew that communities would have a stronger voice if they worked together through a Federation – our coal mining history taught us that. Our tie-in with the Community Planning Partnership has given us real influence. We have developed a way of sharing information and new methods of community involvement which are both inclusive and action-oriented. Our communities have all benefited as a result – not just those with the biggest problems or loudest voices. The process has been so effective in our area that it has been adopted in the northern part of East Ayrshire too.

But none of this would have happened if we hadn't taken the initiative ourselves. We've learnt that communities can't sit back and wait for things to happen; we wanted to take the lead on practical things and, as a result, we have made a real difference to people's lives.

What's next for us?



We aim to make more use of our representation on important decision-making bodies, to make sure that the needs and aspirations of local people continue to be reflected in local plans and policies. We are now planning to expand our activities, increase the number of staff and broaden our funding base. We want to be able to earn a bigger part of income from our activities, rather than just relying on grants. We are particularly keen to start some much-needed, large scale environmental projects in our communities. We want to develop the tourist potential of the East Ayrshire area; it is not yet on the map, so we need to 'sell' the area and co-ordinate our publicity.

Federation chairperson Ian Smith, feels the organisation still has much work to do...

"We wanted a bigger voice in what was happening in our communities and now we have it. The Federation has been a great success. Now it's time to use our hard won influence to tackle the deep-seated problems people still face".

Want to find out more?

You can find out more about the Federation and what we do at:

17 Thistle Business Park
Ayr Road
Cumnock
East Ayrshire KA18 1EQ
Tel: 01290 429088 Email: jason@yellowbuses.org.uk





Linking communities in South Lanarkshire

Who we are and what we do



Community Links is a not-for-profit, community-run organisation working with local communities across South Lanarkshire, focusing on its more deprived areas. We specialise in community engagement and empowerment.

We help bring communities and service providers together, offer a wide range of volunteering and training opportunities, produce a quarterly newspaper – **Community Matters** - and provide a free computer maintenance and advice service. We also support a local environmental task force.

Our work has been recognised nationally with several awards in recent years. We are particularly proud of our 2007 award from the British Urban Regeneration Association.

How we got going

Community Links began life in 2002. 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. Funding was available from the Scottish Executive for empowerment and there was an opportunity to bring people together to start something new.

Anna Shanks, a resident of Whitehill and Hamilton, has been 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"

How we organise ourselves

We set ourselves up as a limited company, with charitable status. The majority of our 11 Board members are community representatives and they hold the key positions of chair and deputy chair. Other places are taken by the local regeneration partnership, private sector organisations and the local council, in an advisory capacity. We employ a team of five people and currently work with more than 40 volunteers.



Where our funding comes from

It costs around £250,000 a year to run our organisation and employ the staff. Our main funding comes from the Government's Fairer Scotland Fund. We also get additional support from this Fund for our ICT Buddy Project. Other funding sources at present include the Voluntary Action Fund, South Lanarkshire Key Fund, the Big Lottery and the Lloyds TSB Charitable Foundation.

What we've achieved so far



Most of our work involves engaging with communities in local regeneration areas. 24 volunteers help with this, as well as distributing *Your Community Matters*, our quarterly newspaper to 45,000 households.

Last year we engaged directly with nearly 2000 people across South Lanarkshire. Our open consultation events involve large numbers of residents. The four regeneration areas we have focused on since we started have benefited enormously from having stronger, more active communities. People are listened to now; they are more clued up and have a positive, practical approach to change. We have certainly contributed to that.

Kay MacIntosh manages the Changing Places Regeneration Partnership in Blantyre and Hamilton...

"Community Links works closely with us. Community representatives on our partnership board have each received personal development training and support, helping them play an active role in our work. Community Links is particularly good at engaging with rarely heard groups, using surveys, focus groups and events to improve the projects and services we and others provide."

16 volunteers are delivering an Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Buddy project, providing recycled home computers, training and support for nearly 1000 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.

Russell Bennett, one of our volunteers and a Community Links board member, is one of them. It has changed his life...

"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 I.T field, and I've now been voted onto their Board as a community rep"



What we've achieved so far



Community Links works directly with Pride of Place, an environmental project covering all of South Lanarkshire's regeneration areas. It carries out environmental improvements, improves community safety and benefits priority groups. Decisions on which environmental improvement projects to support and how much money they each receive is made by a community-led committee – another example of community empowerment.

The problems we've overcome

One of the problems we've faced was building up our credibility with key agencies, particularly the local council, and getting them to support an independent, community-run organisation. We have had a lot of support from officers and the relationship is now extremely positive and supportive.

John McCafferty of South Lanarkshire Council has been working closely with the initiative since it started...

"Many communities are sceptical about the way the public sector consults with them. Community Links has built successful relationships based on trust, through its high quality work and the commitment of its Community Directors".

The success of our volunteering programme has created its own problems – as people's skills and confidence have increased, many of them have found jobs, leaving us with the challenge of finding replacements.

Community representative Jack Ferguson recalls the difficulties in getting early local community support:

"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. We dealt with it by getting out onto the streets and talking to people. Now they are completely behind us"



What we've learned



No two communities are the same. We are always trying to find new ways of engaging with people, since the techniques we used last week in one community may not be appropriate next week in another.

We have also learned how important it is to engage with everyone in a community – not just those who come to meetings or respond to surveys; and how the way people see their communities can be transformed if they feel a sense of ownership over the changes that take place. Part of our job is to help make these sort of things real.

What we've learned

Bobby McKean is a local businessman and community representative. He currently chairs Community Links and has some clear views on what the organisation has learnt over the years...

"Trust, transparency, hard work and partnership are the main learning points for us. We have spent a lot of time building trust between ourselves and with our many partners; we have always been open about the work we do and we have worked very hard to make the organisation a success. I think we have achieved that, but we cannot rest on our laurels"



What's next for us?



Always conscious of our reliance on grants and the need for financial stability, we are now beginning to provide consultancy services to other sectors, particularly health. We want to increase the income we earn by selling our services more widely.

We are looking at turning our ICT Buddy project into a social enterprise. This should enable it to carry out commercial work alongside its continuing community role. We can then use any profits created to cross-subsidise our other activities.

We are also keen to extend our volunteering programme, expanding the numbers as well as the geographical areas we recruit from.

Want to find out more?

You can get in touch with us at...

Community Links (South Lanarkshire)

Unit 1A

Clydeview Shopping Centre

BLANTYRE

G72 0QD

Phone: 01698 827583

Email: comm.links@btconnect.com

Web: www.commlinks.org.uk





A self-empowering community in Renton,
East Dunbartonshire

Who we are and what we do



Cordale is a community-based housing association, based in Renton, West Dunbartonshire. For the last 15 years we have been at the heart of community-led investment here, which has turned our once notorious urban village into one of the most popular places to live in the area.

As a housing association and charity, our main role is providing and managing social housing to meet people's needs. But we have always believed that housing associations must take a broader view, which gives social and economic development equal priority with the housing role. We are involved in a number of initiatives that link housing investment with health, jobs, education, the arts and building community strength.



Our Chairman, Archie Thomson, sums it up like this...

"Renton was once home to a thriving bleaching and dying industry, as well as supplying many workers for the Glasgow shipyards. But those jobs are long gone. Since then, poverty has been a 'binding glue' for people here. So, when we set up Cordale we decided that we were not just going to provide good quality homes for people to enjoy their poverty in"

How we got going

Cordale has been led by local people from its beginnings in the early 1990s. It started in 1991 when a group of active council tenants came together to take on the management of some of the Council homes in Renton. 2 years later and with help from a housing association in Glasgow, 50 community members met to discuss taking on the ownership of these homes; our housing association was born.

How we organise ourselves



Since those early days, Cordale has grown to become a thriving social business. But we have always kept our focus on Renton and its surrounding communities. Our 8 staff are accountable to a growing membership of 300 local people; each year they elect our 15-strong voluntary Management Committee – a balanced mix of tenants and owner occupiers with experience in all walks of life. Demand to join our committee is such that we have had to hold four elections in the past six years.

We hold a Resident's Conference every year. In 2008, the local drama group prepared and performed sketches at the Ma Centre youth club, highlighting issues with housing allocations. Cordale's success has led to a low turnover of properties, but a high number of applicants. Called 'How kin ah no get a hoose?' the sketches tackled head on some of the myths about allocations and gave people the chance to talk through the issues.

Where our funding comes from

Our main source of income is from our tenant's rents – now more than £1 million a year. Our new housing schemes have been financed by a combination of Housing Association Grant, invested by the Scottish Government, and topped up with private finance. But we also attracted significant investment from our local council, other public agencies and charitable trusts and foundations, to complement investment by the Scottish Government. Having a broad spread of investment is always important.

What we've achieved so far

We have built or modernised more than 400 homes in Renton. Alongside our new homes for rent and sale, we have refurbished ex-Council homes, transferred following a near unanimous tenant's ballot, and we now have 40 recently completed Extra Care apartments.

Cordale has been centrally involved in completely changing the heart of the village. The village supermarket, chemist and post office were all built by our housing association's commercial subsidiary. We have also set up a Community Development Trust, a Social Enterprise Centre, a Healthy Living Centre and a Youth Centre – all meeting important local needs.



Our Social Enterprise Centre is the heart of the village. Originally built as a social centre for elderly people by West Dunbartonshire Council, the centre is now run by and for the benefit of the whole community, on a 99 year lease. All but one of the staff are local people taken on not just because they were local, but because they were the best people for the jobs.

As well as hosting community activities, including a community café, the Centre also runs Cordale's Housing Support work, which includes looking after our new Extra Care apartments.

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.

Macca is one of the young people involved in the Renton Youth group. He explains how it works...

"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."



The problems we've overcome

In the early days, we struggled to get support. Many didn't believe that ordinary folk could get together and change their communities. We spent many years trying to convince them that they were wrong. With hard work and dedication, we've overcome the scepticism.

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.



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

"My street was previously the most unpopular 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"

With nearly £38 million invested in Renton in the past 15 years, Cordale has helped pull the community out of the poverty index for the very first time – something we are particularly proud of.

Getting builders to take on local apprentices was initially difficult, but they have come on board now. It has enabled us to give a real boost to the local economy. A recent evaluation suggested that, with our partners, Cordale helped create more than 150 local jobs between 2001 and 2006.



What we've learned

We have learnt much in the past 15 years and we are still learning. Owning assets certainly gives a community status and power, but it is important never to look inwards. We have spent a lot of time coming up with new ways of doing things and this has paid off in terms of outside support. Community leadership is vital and needs to be embedded in the local culture, not least amongst young people. The next generation must be able to keep things going when the pioneers start to run out of steam.

We have also learnt that, to be successful, you have to build practical partnerships with other organisations – you can't do it all on your own. Despite the early tensions, we now have a good working relationship with our local Council. They respect what we've done for Renton and are now a key partner.

Bill Clark, the Council's Social Work and Health Director, sees Cordale's work in Renton as a very positive example of how community-led partnerships can transform people's lives...

"When regeneration involves social, economic and physical change, it makes local people feel better off and more caring of each other"

What's next for us?



Our work in Renton is far from done. Development of 279 new homes for rent and sale is now getting under way on a former contaminated textile mill site beside the River Leven. It followed extensive discussions with residents through a series of six focus groups, helping to plan the scheme and ensuring it meets local needs and expectations.

Cordale has now been asked to get involved in the adjacent village of Alexandria, working with the local tenants and residents association, the Chamber of Commerce and Traders Association on a major regeneration scheme.

We have also pioneered a new partnership approach to funding the regeneration of primary schools, which keeps the financial benefits in the community. Working closely with the local Council, we are hoping to use this model in Renton, bringing schools together on a single site.

Cordale's Director, Stephen Gibson, is confident about the future...

"We don't just talk about community-led regeneration - we do it and have been very successful. But there is much more to do. With continued investment from the Scottish Government we will build more new homes for rent in Renton and Alexandria and use housing-led investment to stimulate our local economy. In partnership with West Dunbartonshire Council, we intend to create new business opportunities that will retain as much social and economic benefit as possible in the area. We are very clear that we don't just build houses, we build communities. As well as pursuing new shopping opportunities, we are looking into the potential to diversify into schools regeneration and extend the boundaries of community ownership".



Want to find out more?

We think we have an inspiring story to tell about community empowerment in Renton. If you would like to know more, you can contact us at:

Cordale Housing Association

1 Red Row

Renton

Dunbartonshire

G82 4PL

Phone: 01389 721 216

Email: info@cordalehousing.org.uk

Web: www.cordalehousing.org.uk





Sowing seeds for community empowerment in
Dumfries and Galloway

Who we are and what we do



Dryfe East Tenants and Residents Association is based in Lockerbie. We have a core group of committed residents – tenants and owners - who meet regularly. With support from Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership and the Council, we decided on a practical, hands-on approach to meeting a specific local community need – lack of play facilities for our children. As a result we feel we have now become an influential body across the whole town.

Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership is the second largest housing association in Scotland, with 10,500 homes. Based in Dumfries, it was set up in 2003 to take on the local authority's housing stock, following a successful tenant's ballot. We work with a network of 13 tenants and residents associations across the area.

How we got going

Dryfe East Tenants and Residents Association started up in 2003, with initial support from the Council. A small group of residents decided that the local park – built to commemorate the Lockerbie bombing disaster - was good for older children, but not for toddlers. We decided to raise money for new equipment.. The Council then declared the existing play equipment unsafe and removed it with no warning or consultation. We promised the community that we would get it reinstated. We spent the next five years lobbying and trying to raise funding.

When the Housing Partnership took over the council housing, we had a lot of support from their Community Involvement Manager. She helped us with funding bids and finding sponsorship. One of our members joined their District Management Committee. We are still represented on this group.

How we organise ourselves

Dryfe East runs on an entirely voluntary basis – we have 6 active committee members, all local residents. Graham Tait, our chair, is an 18 year old who is also a member of the local Community Council.

Dryfe East is one of 13 tenants and residents associations (TARAs) spread across this large, mainly rural part of the country. Together, they play an important role in empowering local communities, particularly where they are well-organised, bring everyone in a community together and are determined to find practical solutions to local problems. Some of them are very active, with an impressive track record of empowering their communities. They are supported by Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership and the Federation of Dumfries and Galloway TARAs.



Where our funding comes from

It took Dryfe East TARA 5 years to raise the money for our play park project in Lockerbie. With an initial target of £19,000, we eventually raised no less than £40,000. £10,000 came from the Big Lottery's Awards for All programme, - a first for Scotland - just over £5000 from Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership, £900 from the Lockerbie Initiative and smaller amounts from the local Rotary Club and Lions Club and the Community Council. Lloyds TSB provided us with a picnic bench.



Angela Brydson, Dryfe East's Secretary, feels its been a long hard struggle that has paid off for local residents...

"Through the TARA we raised more than £2,000 ourselves, with horse racing betting in the local pub, car boot sales, toddlers sponsored walks and quizzes. Fund-raising is never easy, but if you have a good cause, organisations and local people will support you.. We were advised to avoid the big funders and go for the local ones and that approach has worked well for us"

What we've achieved so far



Ronald Richie from Dryfe East TARA has been involved from the start...

"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, through the Communities Scotland 'Seeing is Believing Fund'. We raised all the money and we helped to design it. But the best thing is that the kids – even the teenagers - really do look after it. They have a real sense of ownership"



Consultation was the key to getting community support for the proposals. We talked to everyone overlooking the park. Many of them had young children and were happy to back the idea; no-one objected. We also carried out consultation with children in our local schools and nurseries and in the park, especially on the weekends.

This led directly to us installing a kick wall for teenagers, something they police themselves. The park is often used until 8pm and it's safe because it is overlooked - people keep an eye on things.



The success of the Park project has given us the confidence to take on new projects – small scale, but important to us nevertheless. Our members have been planting daffodils, donated from a local farm, working with our local primary school. We have also helped to get the Lockerbie Citizens Advice centre re-opened.

What we've achieved so far

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; 43 tenants from across the area are actively involved. They are used mainly as a sounding board by the association, but also make decisions on distributing the £50,000 a year Community Pride Fund. This fund supports a wide range of community-led initiatives, including the Dryfe East TARA 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 annual turnover is currently invested in these sort of initiatives; community empowerment is an aspiration, but not yet a priority.

The problems we've overcome

The Housing Partnership's support for our Play Park project was crucial – it provided us with the help and advice we needed and gave us the credibility we needed to attract funders.

The biggest problems we had were being recognised as a group that meant business, knew what it was talking about and had the support of our local community. Once we had overcome those hurdles, Council support fell into place and fund-raising became easier.

Inevitably we have had to deal with questions about how representative we are and how we deal with large sums of money, but we have managed to satisfy everyone on these issues.



Robert Lowther, from Dumfries and Galloway Council, has been managing the King Edwards Park project for the past four years...

"Despite the early problems when the play equipment was removed, the Council now has a good relationship with Dryfe East TARA; they are a pleasure to work with. They are nice people who are switched on and interested."

They have taken the lead and the Council have responded to them. The Housing Partnership has been very supportive, although some of this support may be affected by a recent staff re-organisation. The Park isn't yet finished – there is more funding to be raised."

What we've learned

In Lockerbie, we've learnt that it always takes much longer to achieve things than you think it will or should; that it pays to be persistent; that you have to take local people with you – especially young people in our case – and that raising a lot of money is not always as difficult as it may seem. We also found that visiting others to see how they do things is invaluable; it can be inspiring and give you confidence.

Running a tenants and residents association can be quite demanding – there are never enough active people to share the load, but if you stick together you can really make a big difference in your community.

What's next for us?

Angela Brydson from Dryfe East TARA knows that strengthening their role in Lockerbie is the key to its future...

"There are 2000 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 proposals for a 40 home development in our core area, so there is still plenty of work to be done!"



Zoe Forster, the Housing Partnership's Chief Executive, feels community empowerment is now rising up the association's agenda...

"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"

Want to find out more?



If you want to know more about either the Dryfe East TARA or the Housing Partnership, please contact us at:

Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership

Grierson House
The Crichton
Bankend Road
Dumfries
DG1 4ZS

Phone: 0800 011 3447 Email: customerservice@dghp.org.uk



Dryfe East Tenants &
Residents Association



A community stake in local investment –
Community Regeneration Forums in Dundee

Who we are and what we do



Dundee's Community Regeneration Forums are community-led organisations, sponsored by the Dundee Partnership. They are supported by staff from the City Council's regeneration team. The aim is to put local communities at the heart of urban regeneration in Dundee, bringing together active residents living in the more deprived parts of our City. It has been a significant success.

Each of our Forums involves up to 15 elected residents, with one of them acting as chair. With up to 75 local people now involved, the Forums provide an important focus for community views on regeneration. But we do much more than that. We also decide how money should be spent on our own local priorities; the Forums sound out residents and make bids for the finance needed to put their ideas into practice. It has been an empowering process.

How we got going

The network of five Forums was set up in 2004, following the work of the Social Inclusion Partnership. Dundee now has eight community planning areas. In the five most deprived of these, the idea was to bring residents representatives together to give people a real say in how their neighbourhoods should change.

Council staff took the lead in the early stages, helping to build up the capacity of residents on the new Forums. They offered an extensive training and development programme. Our Forums have the ultimate say on how the Dundee Partnership's Community Regeneration Fund should be divided up at neighbourhood level.

How we organise ourselves

The Forums each have a code of practice which sets out important issues such as who can vote, how decisions are made and who can be a member. Our new members receive induction packs which are tailor-made for them personally and explain what the Community Regeneration Forums are all about.

We bring all five Forums together every quarter at *The Gathering*, events which provide a useful opportunity to share news, ideas, lessons and good practice. They are also used to review progress and plans for the future. Many of our Forum members have also visited community regeneration projects elsewhere in Scotland, to share their experiences and learn from others.



How we organise ourselves



Our Forum members are elected locally in an open, democratic process. Each Forum covers three main neighbourhoods; 5 residents are elected to represent their neighbourhood so each Forum has 15 members. In some areas, up to 40 people took part in elections.

Everyone stands down at the end of each year, but individuals are able to stand for re-election. In practice a quarter of each Forum's membership changes each year. This helps us to both maintain continuity and keep the Forums regularly refreshed with new members. Our partner organisations, particularly the police and housing providers, have generally been very good at attending Forum meetings and supporting the process, alongside City councillors.

Wilma Duncan chairs the Central Community Regeneration Forum...

"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."



Where our funding comes from

Our main funding comes from the Fairer Scotland Fund. Each Forum has an annual Community Regeneration Fund allocation, which is worked out by population size. Significant sums of money have been involved, in previous years ranging from £200,000 to £400,000. Each Forum highlights how Dundee City Council would like to spend this money on local priorities. Provided our proposals fit with the Community Plan and the City's Single Outcome Agreement this is not usually a problem; bids are only turned down if they fall foul of technicalities or legal complications. Local priorities are almost always respected.

Our involvement with partners like the police also helps us draw in extra money for local priorities; employing neighbourhood police teams is a good example.



Murray Webster is a member of the Central Community Regeneration Forum. He feels strongly that, without their own funding, the Forums would have had little impact...

"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 financial decision-making table".

What we've achieved so far



Our Forums have been very active over the past five years. Our decisions have meant that investment by the City Council and others has usually been in line with resident's priorities. The range of improvements has included employing youth workers, environmental improvement schemes, new street lighting, art projects, new children's playgrounds, new resource and information centres and improvements to local parks.

One of our major achievements was a partnership arrangement with Tayside Police, to share intelligence and employ a neighbourhood policing team. Our decisions on funding got this team up and running; the Police now meet all the costs. The Forums have also helped to improve neighbourhood service delivery, particularly how public housing is managed and the bins collected.

We work very hard to ensure that our communities have a real say about what happens locally. We organise regular door-to-door surveys, community newsletters and youth walkabouts. A recent evaluation of community engagement in the City, by Dundee University, concluded that the way we involve our communities in decision-making is widely regarded as effective. It also concluded that our ability to make decisions about the way Community Regeneration Funds are spent seemed to be working well. We feel these are our most important achievements so far.

Alice Bovill chairs the North West Community Regeneration Forum...

"The Forums have changed the way residents think about their neighbourhoods. 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."



The problems we've overcome

Despite our successes, the Forums have not been all plain sailing. Being a Forum member involves a hefty time commitment and a lot of responsibility. It also involves a steep learning curve for newly elected residents. Sometimes this has meant we have struggled to maintain the 75 resident representatives from one year to the next. Getting young people elected has been particularly difficult – most of us are middle-aged and quite a few are retired. We have had to find other ways of making sure young people's voices are heard.

Some residents remain sceptical about the Forums, but most people are behind us. Nevertheless, coming to an agreement on local priorities can be difficult. There have been criticisms that some Community Regeneration Fund schemes should really have been financed through the City Council's mainstream budgets. Our view, however, is that sometimes residents give specific actions a higher priority than the Council do; so we use Forum funds to get things done.

What we've learned

Residents on the Forums often have to make quite difficult technical and strategic decisions; the process can be quite slow and even bureaucratic. It can be quite onerous for some of the people involved, but we are learning new skills and gaining confidence all the time – which we feel is empowering in itself. We have certainly become more knowledgeable and politically astute.

Most community-led organisations find that communications with their Council can sometimes be a problem and we are no exception; there are endless documents to read and the jargon can be highly confusing. Simply keeping up to date is a real challenge. So we have been determined to find time for on-going training and support sessions which improve our knowledge and understanding.

We have learned what we always really knew - that 'local residents know local needs best'. Perhaps more importantly, we have gone some way to convincing public agencies about this too and they are responding.



What's next for us?

We would like to set up a Forum website, so residents can be kept up to date and be more actively involved in our discussions and decisions. We are also at a financial crossroads, with the Fairer Scotland Fund coming to an end, but we feel the new emphasis on community empowerment will help us to keep going. We certainly don't intend to give up our seats around the decision-making table in Dundee!

Want to find out more?



You can find out more about the Dundee Community Regeneration Forums at:

Dundee Partnership
Dundee City Council
21 City Square
Dundee
DD1 3BY
Phone: 01382 438892
Email: stuart.fairweather@dundeecity.gov.uk





Community Councils take the lead in East Lothian

Who we are and what we do



Community councils are voluntary bodies which work closely with local councils across Scotland. They provide a voice for local communities and are able to take on a wide-ranging role, including owning property, employing staff, fund-raising and receiving public sector grants. They are formally consulted on planning applications. Around 1200 community councils have been set up across the country since 1975.

We have 20 Community Councils in East Lothian, with more than 200 councillors, covering a mix of busy market towns and more peaceful rural villages. The funding arrangements put in place by East Lothian Council are unique in Scotland.

How we got going

East Lothian's first community councils were set up in 1976, following national legislation. But the real impetus came in 1996 when East Lothian Council decided to use surpluses from its Direct Labour Organisation to set up a **Local Priorities Scheme**, giving each community council a share of significant funds to spend on their own local projects. This paved the way for a close working relationship between the local authority and the community councils, something which continues to this day.

Lillian Pryde, Community Council Liaison Officer for East Lothian, feels this shared history has been the key to their success...

"There has never been a 'them and us' relationship between community councils and the local authority here; it's a genuine partnership. Many council staff have been community councillors over the years, so everyone feels they're working to the same agenda. Politically and culturally, they have always been seen as an essential part of the way the local authority goes about its business"

How we organise ourselves

None of our community councils employ staff – they are all run entirely by volunteers. They operate their own budgets and do much of their own fund-raising, some of which is used to match-fund grants they receive through mainstream local authority funding.

Our community councils have a reasonably good track record on local democracy; turnout at community council elections, where they are held, was between 23% and 42% last year. In many community councils, however, places are uncontested and there are some vacancies; there is always a need to encourage more local people to take part.

Community councils look after their own patches, but also come together to look at the bigger picture in East Lothian. They meet once a quarter through the Association of East Lothian Community Councils, which helps provide the Council with community feedback on large-scale proposals and changes.



Where our funding comes from

All our community councils run on quite modest budgets; each of them receives a small administrative grant every year, divided between them, based on the size of their population.

The Local Priorities Scheme currently provides them with £129,000 a year, allocated in the same way as the administrative grant. Our community councils use this fund for a wide variety of priority projects, decided locally, which include landscaping, community hall refurbishments, plays areas, fun days and Christmas lighting. This highly successful scheme was supplemented by a Capital Improvement Grant programme in 2001. Community councils had to bid to East Lothian Council for a share of this money – it was a competitive process – and were encouraged to match fund by making their own grant applications. Many have done so and although the capital funding arrangements have recently changed, in 2007-08, £100,000 of public money was used to attract more than £800,000 of matched funding; quite an achievement.

Much of this external funding wouldn't have come into East Lothian without the work done by Community Councils – it all goes on projects they have initiated and which would otherwise not be a high enough priority to attract local authority support.

What we've achieved so far

Overall, the East Lothian Community Councils have made a significant difference in their areas. Inevitably, of course, some have been more active than others. We have highlighted a few of them here.

Dunpender Community Council is quite small, but it covers a wide rural area around the village of East Linton. Judith Priest is the current chair...

"We produce a twice yearly newsletter which is sent out to 1500 households; we also have our own website. We have recently extended the John Muir Way footpath and developed a plan for East Linton to off-set the effects of proposed changes to the A1, a task which involved a big survey of the whole community. The plan is reviewed every year to keep it up to date with local opinion and measure progress. We feel this is empowering because it means we are taking the lead on issues, not waiting to be consulted by East Lothian Council".



Jan Wilson MBE chairs **Haddington Community Council** which has been up and running for the past 25 years...

"Everywhere you look in Haddington you can see something that the Community Council has done. We have established a Pathways Network, helped refurbish the Corn Exchange building and developed a visitor centre. Every year we run a 12 day town festival and produce a handbook about the town. Most of our 13 members are very active and our meetings are always attended by East Lothian Councillors, so we are always well-briefed".

What we've achieved so far



Garvald and Morham Community Council runs a community broadband service in a remote part of its area. A local resident who couldn't obtain a service from British Telecom, suggested the idea in 2004. Five years later it is up and running, with funding provided to the Community Council by the Local Priorities Scheme and the Leader+ European programme. Despite BT's reluctance to provide a service, the Community Council's scheme is now self-financing. Surpluses are reinvested in equipment and making sure the service is fully reliable. The original aerial was mounted on the local Abbey roof, with the monks receiving a free broadband service in return.

Although satellite broadband was used originally, subscriptions were very high and the suppliers went bankrupt. This prompted a change to wireless, which comes from an adjacent village and is a quarter of the price. A wind and solar power generator transmits the broadband signal from here to the local community. There are now plans to set up a limited company to expand the initiative.

Many of our community councils work closely with other agencies; they help point them in the right direction, aiming to improve a local service. Stephen Bunyan, who chairs **Dunbar Community Council** explains...

"We had a policing problem in Dunbar, so the Community Council decided to pay for a bike for the local policeman, using funds from the Local Priorities Scheme. It was a small amount of money, but it paid off – we now have a Community Support Officer, as well as our Policeman, and a second bike, paid for by the Police themselves".



The problems we've overcome



The relationship between East Lothian Council and the network of community councils is generally very positive. Nevertheless, problems will always arise occasionally.

Changes in the funding arrangements made by East Lothian Council in 2007 caused a fair bit of consternation amongst community councils, significantly reducing their funding for key local projects. The introduction of a new Capital Development Fund, in 2008, with a maximum £10,000 per application available on a first come, first served basis, has helped to put things back on an even keel.

Consultation is a thorny issue for some, but certainly not all. Some community councils feel they are over-consulted, whilst others are concerned that new arrangements for Community Planning, with its emphasis on wider community engagement, may undermine their role.

What we've learned

Community Councils work best when they have money they can spend on their own priorities. The unique Local Priorities Scheme we run in East Lothian very much fits the bill in this respect.

Many of our community councils have learned how to make large, as well as small, funding applications and know all about the complexity involved in matching different funds for their priority projects. They have become more mature and experienced organisations over the years; it has been a real learning experience for many of them.

The close ties with the local authority are seen by most community councillors as both empowering and mutually beneficial. Community Councils 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 an arrangement that seems to work well for both sides.

What's next for us?

Whilst some people would like to see their community councils have more power and responsibility, particularly over finance, most feel it might make the role of community councillor more onerous and therefore less attractive.

"Support from East Lothian Council is superb, but it would be going too far to say that the local authority gives the Community Councils power"
Jim Thompson Chair, Garvald and Morham Community Council Community Council

"More power would be a strain. The majority of us are here because we want to be, not because we have to be. That makes it different"
Jan Wilson Chair, Haddington Community Council

There is a balance to be struck here and we feel we have it about right 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. There is no real appetite for changing this successful formula in the near future.

If you would like to know more about the work of community councils in East Lothian, you can contact...

Community Council Liaison Officer
East Lothian Council
John Muir House
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Community Buy-Out on the Isle of Gigha

Who we are and what we do



The island of Gigha sits between the Kintyre peninsular and Islay in south west Scotland. Its 3500 acres support our small community of 156 people. We set up the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust in 2001 when the laird decided to put the island up for sale. We organised a community buy-out and now own and manage 47 cottages, 4 farms, a hotel, quarry, wind farm and a 54 acre garden, including a walled garden. Our village hall has been in community ownership since the early 1950s.

Susan Allan chairs the Trust...

"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"



How we got going

The decision to put our island up for sale gave us a once in a lifetime opportunity. Undaunted by the near £4 million asking price and with backing from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Land Fund and the MSP, we decided to make a bid. We called a public meeting in the village hall and, after a lengthy debate and a vote, the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust was born.

Two members of our community visited the Isle of Eigg to find out how a community buy-out had worked out; they came back inspired. A great deal of hard work and numerous meetings followed, but it brought its rewards in March 2002 when transfer to the Trust was completed. Trust member John Martin sums up the change...

"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."

How we organise ourselves

The Trust is run by a board of seven people, all elected by our 96 community members – 80% of the island's adult population. Every Trust member over 18 can stand for election to the Board, but it is not just Board members who take responsibility - community participation is a crucial part of our decision making. We now want younger residents on the island to have a greater say in what happens.

We employ a number of office staff to help us manage the business side of things, oversee the housing renovation work, run the hotel and look after Achamore Gardens.



Where our funding comes from

The original funding for the buyout came from a Scottish Land Fund grant of £3.5 million (£1 million of which had to be repaid within 2 years) and a £0.5 million grant from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. We sold the Laird's house and fundraised on the island to repay the loan.

We've had further grants from the Government's Rural Empty Properties Fund for renovating the cottages and one of £130,000 towards our wind farm. We have also taken out commercial loans. Income from housing rents and the wind farm helps to pay back these loans. Other income comes from businesses run by our two trading companies. A Big Lottery grant is helping us modernise the old Steadings for self-catering accommodation.

We are slowly moving towards financial independence, but at present are still dependent to a certain extent on grants and ongoing fundraising. We expect to break even financially within three years, but we are always looking for new income-generating opportunities.

What we've achieved so far



Many things have improved on the island in the last seven years. Most of the homes were below the Tolerable Standard when we took over, but are now being renovated. Although this means higher rents it also brings modern standards, warmer living conditions and lower energy bills. The Trust now has a housing plan, supported by the Scottish Government, which has already seen 18 new homes for rent built by a local housing association. Our population is now increasing; there are now 31 children here; seven years ago there were only six.

We now have virtually full employment on Gigha. Our wind farm generates £100,000 of income a year with other income coming from the quarry and our self-catering cottages. We've also improved the island's only hotel.

Yet despite these many important changes, for some the Trust's main achievements have been about people. Gigha is a small island; everyday social and community activities are seen by everyone here as important. We now run a music festival and a village pantomime, whilst five-a-side-football, keep-fit, carpet bowls, afternoon tea and a drama group are all regular activities in our village hall.

There is much talk here now of greater freedom, pride and respect. '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. Confidence in Gigha's future is increasing. We are now in control of our own destiny.



The problems we've overcome



When the island was put up for sale we thought this meant we could buy everything. We knew the houses were in a poor state, but we thought we might be able to use income from the fish farm to help fund improvements. Unfortunately, the laird decided to keep the profitable parts of the fish farm.

In some ways this made us even more determined to succeed. Paying back a £1 million pound loan within 2 years is evidence of this determination, involving as it did a lot of ingenuity and sheer hard work, particularly on fundraising.

Keeping everyone involved and finding a way through the many different views and interests within the community was never going to be easy. Willie McSporran, one of the Trust's founder members, sums it up like this...

"In many ways, the buy-out itself was the easy bit. There is nothing more difficult than trying to please a whole community. There are on-going issues and disagreements as there is in any small community, but you deal with this the way you would in any family."



Staff turnover and continuity has been an issue for us - at present we are without a business manager, but we are hoping to employ someone shortly. Getting the right staff can be an issue on an isolated island when the salary we can pay is perhaps not as high as people can earn elsewhere.

Balancing the Trust's books is also a constant headache and there have been some inevitable community tensions over finances. But we are now moving towards a much stronger financial position and new business ideas are constantly being put forward by members.

Kerrie Redington, who has been advising the Trust and works for Highlands and Island's Enterprise is well aware of the problems initiatives like this can face...

"Many island residents have very high expectations of the Trust, but they seem unaware of just how big a commitment is involved both in time and responsibility. I worry sometimes about the strain it can put on people. Having said that, what they've achieved in just seven years has been amazing."

What we've learned

Our community buy-out has been a great success, but getting there has not been an easy process. We have all had to work extremely hard – board members were sometimes meeting three or four times a day in the early stages – and we needed to find the right advisers. Fortunately, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Argyll and Bute Council have been very supportive, whilst the staff we've employed have been knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed.

Susan Allan feels it's been a joint effort from all those involved, not just the islanders...

"It has been a steep learning curve for all of us; without our advisors we would not have been able to do it. I was all for it at the beginning, but had my reservations during the process. The advice and support from our two major supporters kept us all going".



What's next for us?

In the short term we need to get our new business development manager in post – this will make it much easier for the community volunteers. We also need to keep the momentum of our housing renovation programme going and look at new business opportunities, including making the hotel more profitable.

We may also decide to install another wind turbine. As new members join the board we will need to make sure we put in place a continuous programme of support, advice and training. There is still plenty to do here.

Want to find out more?



We are always keen to show people our island and talk about how we managed our community buy-out. You can contact us at:

Gigha Heritage Trust

Isle of Gigha

Argyll

PA41 7AA

Phone 01583-505390

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Tenant-led estate investment in North Ayrshire

Who we are and what we do



North Ayrshire Council launched its Estate Based Project in 2006. The aim was to radically change the way investment in estates was decided, giving tenants some control for the first time.

Our thinking behind the new approach is simple - tenant involvement in decisions about estate investment will improve the sustainability of their neighbourhoods and encourage a sense of ownership. People generally know what's best for their estate. All tenants groups as well as individual tenants are actively involved in the project.

Most of the physical improvements involve new fencing, paving and security and the outcomes so far are encouraging. Problems with vandalism and graffiti have reduced and people are taking more care of their neighbourhoods and it shows.

The estate-based project scheme cannot be used to fund work to individual homes, but it can be used to benefit the environment and/or improve security where tenants live.

How we got going

The Council worked closely with our registered tenants and residents associations to help get the initiative up and running.

Every year we advertise the project through our Tenancy Matters newsletter; it gives all tenants in North Ayrshire the opportunity to send us proposals for their area. Once proposals have been checked against set criteria, they are sent to the tenants and residents associations to prioritise. This enables associations to obtain a share of the available funds. A programme of projects to be carried out for the forthcoming year is also set out in the newsletter.

Estate walkabouts are carried out and tenant's priorities are discussed and agreed for the following year.



How we organise ourselves

We have 16 active tenants groups in North Ayrshire; 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 £2.5 million is divided between all the areas.

We have seen a rapid development of our tenant participation strategy in recent years. Since the introduction of the Estate Based initiative, participation and consultation has increased immensely. This project is part of the menu of options for tenant empowerment in North Ayrshire.

Where our funding comes from

All the funding for the project comes from the Council's Housing and Environment budget, much of it effectively from tenant's rents.

Hugh Cuning, from North Ayrshire Council, oversees the project and works closely with tenants on specific schemes...

"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."



What we've achieved so far



Most of our schemes have made a big difference to people's lives, improving the local environment as well as their safety and security.

Yonderton Place in West Kilbride is a typical example. Some older tenants living here were struggling to maintain their front gardens, which were not fenced off. People were using them as a short cut and the chipped area was difficult to manage. The tenants decided that they would benefit if their gardens could be fenced and the chipped area 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 which was then agreed and funding provided; the improvements have been dramatic.

The Estate Based Project is not just about fencing and environmental work; many other improvements have been made on our estates, including security lighting, parking schemes and door entry systems for flats – all decided by tenants, not the Council.

Alex Younger represents Fullarton Tenants Association. He has been involved in the project from the start and has no doubts about its benefits...

"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"



What we've achieved so far

Lesley Baird, from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service in Glasgow, has been working on the project as an external advisor...

"In a very short time, North Ayrshire Council has moved from having a very limited, traditional approach to tenant involvement to one which now has a lot of admirers and interest in copying what they have done. The fact that they are putting in significant resources and the community is having a real say in how these resources are being allocated in their estates is a very positive development."



The problems we've overcome



We haven't run into too many major problems so far. It can, however, sometimes be difficult to get individual tenants interested or to maintain their interest. With schemes like this which affect everyone in a street or small neighbourhood, this can be a problem.

The project does not provide funding for owner occupiers, which can also create difficulties. In some places, owners now outnumber tenants; if they don't join in and pay their share of the costs, it can be difficult to carry out a comprehensive scheme which meets everyone's needs. Fencing schemes present particular challenges in this respect.

We work hard to include everyone, but sometimes we have to exclude individual properties, which is a shame.

Helen Malcolmson, from Castlepark and Eglinton Tenants and Residents Group knows how important it has been to involve everyone in a neighbourhood, not just tenants...

"Our tenants know what's going on and what needs changing in the area. But we've also made sure that the wider community is also involved; these improvements benefit everyone by making our estates a better place to live."



What we've learned

People know what is important in their own area and what makes the area tick. This project makes sense both for the Council and for local people. The process is both simple and effective and many estates have improved significantly as a result. Often small improvements can make a big difference.

Good communications are important. Tenants and residents associations have developed strong relationships with the Council, but also with other agencies such as the Police. The fact that a lot of money has been put into the scheme has been important; it means that improvements can get done quickly and are not left hanging in the air.

Keeping people involved and interested, however, is always an issue; there is definitely a need for on-going support, advice and training. We have an on-going development programme for tenants, which offer training sessions to improve people's skills.



What's next for us?

Moves are now afoot to bring all 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 housing investment plans generally. An Estate Based satisfaction survey is also planned for Autumn 2009, which will tell us how satisfied tenants are with the project and how it might be further improved. In the meantime, the plan is to carry on with what has been a very successful project so far.

Want to find out more?



If you would like more information about this project, please contact Tracey Wilson at:

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Collective endeavour in the Orkney Islands

Who we are and what we do



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

We have 20 very active Community Councils spread throughout the islands, with around 150 of the 20,000 population directly involved as elected councillors. Some of our Community Councils have set up development trusts, to take on important island assets, secure funds for their modernisation or run local services for direct community benefit.

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

How we got going

Our first Community Councils were elected in 1976, following local government reorganisation three years earlier. It was widely agreed that there needed to be community-based forums on the islands to develop closer links between communities and service providers. Community Councils made sense to people here – they gave them more influence over decisions which affected them and provided the Council with important feedback on local opinion.

James Stockan is Vice-Convenor of Orkney Islands Council...

“The Community Councils here were set up to create empowerment and are held in high regard by the local authority. This relationship is 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.”



How we organise ourselves

Our Community Councillors are all elected volunteers with a strong commitment to their island communities. We all work together, consulting our communities, deciding our priorities and then securing the funds to turn them into reality.

Community Council elections are held every four years, coinciding with those of the local authority. The entire community is invited to vote by secret postal ballot. Around half the councillor positions are contested, which shows the level of interest and involvement there is amongst our different island communities.

Orkney Islands Council has set up a Community Council Liaison Office, in Kirkwall, which acts as a two-way communication link between the council and our 20 Community Councils. Staff attend every Community Council meeting to provide information and advice. Each Community Council also has its own computer and office equipment.

Where our funding comes from

Every Community Council receives an annual grant of £3,500 from the Council to cover its running costs. Annual grants for specific projects are also made available, with the money allocated on the basis of population size, but with a weighting towards those islands most in need of support. These grants are for collective community projects – new sports facilities, recreational activities, travel and traditional local events, such as ceilidhs, which are an important part of community life.

Our Community Councils have always been ambitious, so not surprisingly there is never enough annual grant funding to meet community priorities. A Seedcorn fund has been available since 1998, set up to help get small projects on the islands off the ground and attract funding from other agencies. Its main focus has been on giving a boost to the island economies and it has been a real success story. A number of important projects would not have started without it and a wide range of external funding has been drawn in that might not otherwise have come to the islands.



What we've achieved so far

Maureen Spence works for Orkney Islands Council, leading the Community Council liaison team. She is enthusiastic about the work they do...

"I feel the biggest achievement is that the Community Councils have steadily built up their strength and credibility and are now very well respected by Orkney Islands Council; the close working relationship means that very little happens unless there is local community support. The Community Councils have definitely empowered our island communities."



Transport is a big issue, particularly for our more remote islands. Several Community Councils have focused on improving transport connections, to boost their local economies. Westray is a typical example. Ten years ago the island was struggling with its population of 600 people falling by 10% a year. The Community Council secured a crucial change in the ferry timetable so that people could day trip from the mainland and the ferry landing has also been moved to the south end of the island. These changes may seem small, but they have made a huge difference for the community on Westray.

Danny Harcus has been a Community Councillor on Westray for over 20 years and has led the transport initiative on the island....

"Letting local people take the lead on projects like this is just common sense. After all, we know what is best for our communities because we live and work here all the time."



What we've achieved so far

The Community Council's role in setting up Development Trusts has been a major achievement on the islands and has enabled us to pursue a wide variety of initiatives. It has unlocked a lot of funding which we would not otherwise have been able to get our hands on.

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 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.



Shapinsay 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.

Sheila Garson is a local Community Councillor and chair of the Shapinsay Heritage Trust...

"There was a lot of support from the Community Council. The Smithy was a very important project as your heritage is what gives you identity and a place in your community. Being a registered charity opened a lot of doors for us"



Papa Westray is one of our smallest and most northerly islands, with a population of just 70 people. 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.

Neil Rendall is a Papa Westray Community Councillor...

"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!"



The problems we've overcome

Our Community Councils are, in some ways, a victim of their own success; some community councillors feel they are 'consulted to death'. Their role as a sounding board for local communities means they often feel inundated with irrelevant, onerous or mundane consultation documents.

Nevertheless, their commitment and dynamism means they are always looking for more money than is available to complete ambitious community projects. Setting up development trusts has helped tackle this problem, bringing additional investment to the islands.

Working together is not always easy when you can't just jump in a car or get on your bike to go to meetings with the Council so we have spent a lot of effort making sure our transport arrangements work well...and they do.



What we've learned

We have learnt four important lessons about community empowerment. Firstly, if community councils want to do more than just be consulted or have influence over major decisions, then setting up a development trust is a good way forward; secondly, that a strong working relationship with the local authority benefits both organisations; thirdly, that sometimes getting the little things right is more important to communities than high profile projects; and lastly, that there can be a limit to how much volunteers can be expected to do. It is all about getting the balance right – something we feel we have managed to achieve in the Orkney Islands.

What's next for us?

The Community Councils are, in many ways, the glue which holds our remote island communities together. Membership is increasing and the work they do is universally appreciated; so our aim is to ensure we keep this going. Our development trusts will take on new and innovative projects to improve island life. We also want to maintain the same level of the support from the Council and the close working relationship we have built up in recent years.

Want to find out more?



You can find out more about how our Community Councils work by contacting us at...

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Placemaking in South Ayrshire

Who we are and what we do



Placemaking is a relatively new idea which has been imported from the United States. It is being pioneered in this country by Greenspace Scotland, working in partnership with several local authorities. One of them is South Ayrshire, where it is being tested with three different communities. The aim is to bring these communities and local agencies together to turn uninspiring and often unused public spaces into places where people want to spend time.

Placemaking is not an easy thing to describe. It involves a series of observations, interviews, surveys, taking photographs and workshops. The workshops are used to look at, listen to and ask questions of people in a particular space, to find out their needs and aspirations. The information collected is then used to create a shared vision for that place. Often beginning with small scale, do-able improvements that can bring immediate benefits to spaces and the people who use them, Placemaking is also about the longer term – agreeing how these spaces should be looked after and where the money might come from to make sure this is done well.

How we got going

In South Ayrshire, the Council recognised that its more successful public spaces were lively, secure and attractive places that encourage people to use them. We wanted to see if Placemaking could help deliver similar results in some of our more deprived communities. We used Greenspace Scotland to help train up our staff. We then called an initial public meeting for people who might be interested in the relationship between regeneration and the environment, to test out whether there was interest in setting up Placemaking groups. The response was encouraging - three groups were established in Girvan, Lochside and Tarbolton.

David Sherlock, from South Ayrshire Council, helped start up these projects and is a Placemaking enthusiast...

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



How we organise ourselves

All three Placemaking projects are different, but each follows the same path and uses the same techniques. Community empowerment is at the heart of each one, with a combination of ‘quick wins’ which enable communities to see early changes, and a longer period of testing out ideas, so that the final schemes can have a real sense of community ownership. It's a gradual process with no certainty about the outcomes when you start. In that sense, it is still experimental.

Placemaking is not just about making better spaces for people. It helps to build bridges between communities and agencies, it gets young people involved in planning, it builds community capacity and it can give communities a new sense of identity and pride.



Where our funding comes from

Placemaking doesn't have its own budget in South Ayrshire. Funding for schemes which emerge from the Placemaking process can come from a wide variety of sources. Many improvements require little or no funding anyway; sometimes voluntary effort is all that's needed. For bigger changes, the Council and its community planning partners are the main sources of support, but other agencies, including local businesses, are often involved.

What we've achieved so far



Tarbolton is a small, former mining village in the South Ayrshire countryside. It was the first of our Placemaking projects to get started and has been very successful so far. Many of the village's public spaces were run down and unused. The community and local agencies were brought together to help re-create a new heart for the village. The aim was to tackle the disused village square, a war memorial and the village entrances.

Tarbolton has a number of well-established community groups, including an active tenants and residents association. They run events, fund-raise and get involved in decision-making about many aspects of the village. It's a vibrant community, but also one in need of investment to improve its image and attract visitors.

With 30 organisations involved in the initial Placemaking workshops, consultation quickly expanded to include contributions from over 200 local people. The community very quickly took ownership of the process, tackling many of the problems themselves - cleaning entrance signs and painting railings.

With a longer term vision for Tarbolton now in place, the community is now leading on finding the funds to redevelop its main public spaces.



Sam Gardiner, Secretary of Tarbolton Tenants and Residents Association, has been involved in Placemaking from the start. He feels that without the input from local residents, the village would still be struggling to deal with its problems...

"Our vision for Tarbolton was a genuinely community-led process – we have taken the initiative here when others seemed to have written our village off. Investment here has been scarce, but we have now done a lot to improve things ourselves."



David Burns helped set Placemaking up in Tarbolton and undertook the training course provided by Greenspace Scotland. He is the local Housing Manager for South Ayrshire Council.

"People really took the idea to their hearts and now, volunteers rather than the Council are leading on the regeneration of the village"

What we've achieved so far

Lochside is a neighbourhood on the north side of Ayr, built in the late 1940s. Work has begun on housing renewal here and there are plans for two new public spaces. Placemaking has focused on the existing and new green spaces.

Around 30 community members and local agency representatives have been involved in a series of workshops, along with a group of young people from the area. We looked at how new spaces, created by housing renewal, should be designed. It's been a slow process here – much of the housing renewal work has been delayed, but despite this, those involved see it as a valuable experience.



In Girvan, the area known as 'Stumpy Corner' was seen as both a problem and an opportunity; it seemed ideal for the Placemaking process. An Action Plan to improve the area was drawn up by local people. Though relatively new, the group is now attracting more volunteers. Some 'quick win' projects such as painting seats and renovation of historic plaques have taken place while the group consider linking up with forthcoming events in the town. Funding for large scale work will only be sought when the area becomes more vibrant and the group feel they have a better understanding of how the space can best be used. Brenda Buchanan is a resident on the Make it Happen Group...

'It's been a good learning process all around, especially for the planners working with our community.'

The problems we've overcome

The outcomes of our Placemaking projects are never certain. Whilst Tarbolton really took off when the community took ownership of the process and got involved in significant numbers, getting the local community involved in the Stumpy Corner initiative has proved difficult so far – it is currently led mainly by local agencies.

There is always a danger that communities will find the relatively slow pace of Placemaking frustrating when sites have been a problem for years and there is no readily available pot of money there to improve them. We have tackled this by focusing on small things that can be done quickly and at minimal cost.



Deryk Irvine of Greenspace Scotland feels Placemaking projects must have time to develop...

"Placemaking is a long term process. It often involves run down, complicated sites in different ownerships with no easy solutions. It takes time to come up with the right approach and this gives local communities the time they need to build up their skills and experience. In South Ayrshire, the Council have understood the approach and it's working well, but even here some agencies have found it difficult to come to terms with. They often want to see instant solutions, turning ideas into plans and then action. Placemaking is a journey for local communities, not an end in itself"

What we've learned



Placemaking in South Ayrshire has been a learning experience for everyone over the past three years. Our main conclusions about it can be summed up like this:

- Community empowerment that is early and continuous must be at the heart of each project
- 'Quick wins' help sustain community interest and involvement
- Testing out ideas properly helps make longer term changes more sustainable
- Involving the widest group of agencies from the start ensures that the long term visions are shared, achievable, and have commitment from everyone
- Placemaking projects are experimental and that means they won't all succeed in the way we hoped or expected

What's next for us?

Placemaking has a lot of potential. The pilot projects in South Ayrshire and elsewhere in Scotland are showing communities and agencies how it can help deal with difficult sites and empower local communities.

The new emphasis on communities owning local assets opens up the possibility of some Placemaking sites being transferred into community ownership, so their long term maintenance and management can be done locally. We are hopeful that funds from the Big Lottery's Community Assets Fund might help with this.



Want to find out more?



We are always pleased to talk to people about our Placemaking schemes. Please contact us at:

South Ayrshire Council

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