



TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION INQUIRY

1.0 Introduction

This Briefing Paper will:

- Give a short description of the programmes and measures the Department employs for the regeneration of town centres;
- Use any statistics available to try to identify areas where disadvantage and poverty have persisted in spite of Government action and discuss the provision and need for evaluation of policy;
- Identify the key mechanisms of engagement with local communities and other key stakeholders when taking forward regeneration initiatives; and
- Identify and consider relevant urban regeneration initiatives and activities outside Northern Ireland.

2.0 Department for Social Development Policy Objectives

The Department for Social Development's ('the Department') policy objective for regeneration, in pursuance of its statutory authority, is to promote and implement a comprehensive approach to tackling social, economic and physical regeneration and to redress disadvantage in towns and cities across Northern Ireland.

All of the Department's urban regeneration activity is directed at supporting both people and the places where they live, work and socialise. It therefore includes a wide range of physical, community, social and economic initiatives¹.

Urban regeneration schemes are the responsibility of Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO), North West Development Office or Regional Development Office, depending on their location. These offices work up schemes in conjunction with Roads, Planning & Construction Services and also with District Councils.

The Department has a total of £135.4 million 2007-08 for Urban Regeneration/Community Development. In addition to resources for 2007 – 2008, the Department has been allocated £15.1 million for Urban Regeneration Non – Cash Costs².

¹ Clooney Regeneration Masterplan (October 2006) DSD.

² DSD Corporate Business Plan 2007 – 2008 Appendix 2.

3.0 Key Priorities for Urban Regeneration

A good practice guide, *'Vital and Viable: A Good Practice Guide For Breathing New Life Into Cities and Towns'* (August 2007)³ ('Vital and Viable') contains 'Critical Success Factors for Regeneration' and is published by the Department. It is intended for use outside Belfast and Londonderry/Derry and in the reinvigoration of city and town centres where there is no specific development strategy.

'Vital and Viable' states:

Development plans for cities and towns must articulate clearly their contribution to the overall policy framework for the regeneration of urban areas. The document goes on to list factors for the success of schemes which are:

- Maximising potential – ensuring strategic long-term development within the Regional Development Strategy.
- Addressing key priorities for regeneration – greater focus on sustainability, design and retailing issues.
- Joined-up Government – working together in agencies and local councils to maximise opportunities.
- Local planning and delivery – town centre health checks, strategic plans with effective town centre management.
- Private sector role – complimenting private sector investment by targeted public sector spending.
- Widening markets – providing safer environments and daytime and evening attractions.

'Vital and Viable' also states that plans for successful regeneration of cities and towns must address the following key priorities:

- Sustainability – For city and town centres this means that social inclusivity, environmental impact and economic health must be taken into account when plans are prepared, development is proposed and government support is considered.
- Design – High quality building design is a key success factor, linked with the provision of public realm to an equivalent standard. The creation of new iconic buildings or the re-development or preservation of landmark buildings, coupled with sensitive design, can create a real sense of place.
- Retailing – The retail offering remains key to the vast majority of successful city and town centres and is being influenced by the increasing dominance of national retailers and international brands coupled with the growth of out-of-town shopping centres. The challenge for cities and towns is to project a unique identity and preserve the local retail offering in a way which is easily accessible.
- Variety – Leisure, entertainment, sporting and recreational pursuits in city and town centres provide other uses for town centres for the local community and visitors to the area. Evening and night time economies are now an integral element contributing to the vibrancy of towns and can work supportively with town centre living⁴.

³ Vital and Viable: A Good Practice Guide For Breathing New Life Into Towns and Cities (DSD) August 2007.

⁴ 'Vital and Viable' page 4.

4.0 Programmes and Measures for 'Town Centre Regeneration'

In Northern Ireland the Regional Development Office of the Department is the lead agency for urban regeneration outside of Belfast and the North West. The working definition of urban is greater than 4,500 residents⁵.

Strategic Framework

In delivering regeneration schemes the Department complies with the requirements of 'Lifetime Opportunities'⁶ which is a cross-Departmental approach targeting programmes and services to benefit the most disadvantaged people, groups and areas.

Other cross-cutting Government policies and strategies impacting on urban regeneration include:

- *The Sustainable Development Strategy*⁷ with a key target of developing regeneration master plans for all major towns and cities in Northern Ireland;
- *The Regional Development Strategy*⁸ which sets the overall planning context for town centres in Northern Ireland up to 2025;
- *A Shared Future*⁹ which aims to deliver town and city centres in Northern Ireland that are safe and welcoming; and
- Area Development Plans in the form of area plans, local plans or subject plans. Development Plans inform the general public, statutory agencies and developers of the policy framework and land use proposals that will be used to guide development decisions within their local area¹⁰.

Regional Towns

Town Centre Promotions and Marketing Schemes

Town centre promotions and marketing schemes are to encourage local residents and visitors to use retail and other facilities in regional town and city centres¹¹. Applications for funding were made through Councils or Town Centre Managers in June 2005 and funding of between £20,000 and £75,000 was awarded to 17 towns from an annual budget of £200,000. An evaluation of this programme is currently underway.

Shop Fronts Scheme

This is a pilot of environmental improvement schemes in Dungannon, Portrush and Lisburn and is still to be evaluated.

⁵ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/rdo_areas_we_deal_with.pdf

⁶ 'Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland' (2006) OFMDFM <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/antipovertynov06.pdf>

⁷ 'First steps towards sustainability: A Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland' (May 2006) OFMDFM available at: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sustain-develop.pdf>

⁸ Shaping Our Future: The Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (2001) DRD <http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=308>

⁹ A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland (March 2005) <http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/policy-strategic.pdf>

¹⁰ Written Evidence (from DSD) to the Social Development Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration (November 2007)

¹¹ Department's First Day Brief.

Comprehensive Development Schemes

Schemes being progressed include £150m schemes in Bangor and Coleraine and a £20m scheme in Enniskillen¹². The Department has set a target to continue using its land acquisition and development powers to tackle areas of underutilised land in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas¹³.

Urban Development Grants

The Urban Development Grant programme has been running in Belfast and Londonderry/Derry for many years. It provides financial assistance to private sector property owners and developers for the development of vacant, derelict or underused land and buildings. In May 2006 the programme was extended on a pilot basis to five regional towns; Strabane, Lurgan, Ballymoney, Larne and Dungannon. Thirteen applications have been received; two in Ballymoney, one in Dungannon, two in Larne, three in Lurgan and five in Strabane. To date two of these applicants (one each in Dungannon and Larne) have been granted awards of £80,886 and £256,393 respectively. The remaining projects are at various stages of the assessment process. Those projects with full supporting information in place including plans and estimated costs are being appraised. Three schemes have been revised and their supporting information is being brought up to date so that appraisal may proceed.

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland has been received for 2008-09 -2010-11 and the Department is considering its priorities based on existing commitments. Currently [7 November 2007] there are two committed projects in Dungannon and Larne, with funding allocated in 2007-08 and 2008-09. The remaining Urban Development Grant Projects are being appraised and if viable will be considered for support¹⁴.

Table 1: Progress of pilot projects

	Ballymoney	Dungannon	Larne	Lurgan	Strabane	Totals
No of Projects	2	1	2	3	2	10
Grants awarded to date	0	1	1	0	1	3
Total Grant awarded	0	£80,886	£256,393	0	£38,000	£375,279

Source: DSD

Public Realm and Environmental Improvement Scheme

Public Realm Work in support of physical town centre regeneration has commenced in Newcastle. Schemes have also been undertaken in other towns such as Armagh, Bangor, Cookstown, Coleraine, Downpatrick, Enniskillen, Lisburn, Magherafelt, Portadown, Omagh, Strabane Portrush, Tandragee and Warrenpoint¹⁵.

¹² DSD Corporate Business Plan 2007 – 2008.

¹³ DSD Corporate Business Plan 2007 – 2008 Appendix 2.

¹⁴ Information from DSD received 7.11.2007

¹⁵ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/urcdg-urban_regeneration/programmes_measures/reinvigoration_town_centres/environmental_improvement_schemes.htm

Major schemes completed within the past year include Omagh town centre (£1.7 m of which the Department provided £1.5m)) and Enniskillen (£1.4m of which the Department provided £1.2 m). In addition a £3.1m Environmental Improvements scheme to compliment a new Arts Centre in the Omagh Riverside area will be completed this year.

Work has commenced in Newcastle on the promenade and Main Street (£3.7m) and will be phased over an 18-month period until May 2008. The regeneration scheme currently being undertaken in Newcastle was awarded the Northern Ireland Public Realm Award sponsored by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in recognition of its significant and beneficial impact on the appearance and enjoyment of Newcastle.

In Armagh a Public Realm Scheme is due to commence later this year as part of the Armagh City Centre Integrated Development Plan and will take up to 3 years to complete. The total cost of the scheme is estimated at £5,930,000, of which the Department funding will be up to £3,090,000, or approximately half of the overall cost. Work is due to commence in 2008¹⁶.

5.0 Measuring Success

This section of the paper looks at the evaluation and measurement of the impact of urban regeneration. Although the Department has begun to evaluate individual programmes, a report commissioned by the Department in 2001¹⁷ stresses the importance of evaluating the impact of urban regeneration policy in Northern Ireland.

Policy Impact Measurement

In 2001 the Department appointed Cambridge Economic Associates (CEA) to examine existing measurement of urban regeneration policy and make recommendations for future measurement of the new urban regeneration strategy. The subsequent report¹⁸, referring to Public Service Agreements and Service Delivery Agreement targets to aid accountability and performance management, states:

‘...targets need to be capable of being precisely monitored in terms of which reflect the potential effectiveness of the policy intervention in question. The key to successful target-setting will be to ensure that whatever targets are selected are clearly nested within a “theory of change” or logic chain which relates public expenditure inputs achieved to an anticipated contribution to positive enhancement to economic, social and environmental conditions in the neighbourhood, district or Northern Ireland level. (Para. 3.19)

The report’s authors argue in favour of ‘bottom up’ performance measurement with a clear need for baseline figures to measure improvement. There also needs to be a clear understanding of what economic, social or environmental outcomes can be reasonably expected from a programme before targets can be set.

¹⁶ Information from DSD 7.11.2007

¹⁷ ‘People and Place A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, Working Paper 2:Urban Regeneration in Northern Ireland – Policy Measurement’ (2002) DSD

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/people_and_place_workingpaper2.pdf

¹⁸ ‘People and Place A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, Working Paper 2:Urban Regeneration in Northern Ireland – Policy Measurement’ (2002) DSD

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/people_and_place_workingpaper2.pdf

Programme Measurement

In addition to the 'Vital and Viable' good practice guide for town and city centre regeneration, the Department has begun to evaluate its programmes for urban regeneration. Evaluation has shown, for example, that a Public Realm Scheme in Banbridge between 2002 and 2005 has reduced vacancy rates for commercial property in the improved area to zero. An evaluation of Town Centre Promotions and Marketing Schemes is currently underway and an evaluation of Urban Development Grants is planned for 2008¹⁹.

Town Centre Health Checks are carried out by Town Centre Partnerships to assess how busy a town centre is and its capacity to attract ongoing investment. Their purpose is to provide a baseline position for monitoring regeneration development plans.

The Urban Regeneration and Community Development Group has also recently commenced a review of all its urban regeneration and community development policies and programmes to evaluate the extent to which these have met their strategic and operational objectives. This will inform the direction that future policies and programmes will take. This is expected to conclude in spring 2008²⁰.

Impact in Areas of Deprivation: Neighbourhood Renewal

The Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy is a 10 year inter-departmental strategy aimed at moving away from an individual project approach to a planned, integrated long-term approach to tackling disadvantage in the worst 10% of areas of multiple-deprivation in Northern Ireland²¹. A key element is the establishment of Neighbourhood Partnerships which should include key political, statutory and voluntary, community and private sector stakeholders who will be expected to develop long term visions and Action Plans for their areas²².

The Strategy was launched in 2003 with Phase 1 funding in April 2004. The first phase of funding was to stabilise key organisations during the transition from making Belfast Work and the Londonderry Regeneration Initiative to Neighbourhood Renewal. Phase 2 funding was made available in September 2004 as an interim arrangement to build foundations for the full implementation of Neighbourhood Renewal and the production of Neighbourhood Action Plans. These are to be produced on a yearly basis with a rolling three year projection. Phase 3 will assist with the full cross-departmental implementation of the Neighbourhood Action Plans, but is not anticipated until 2010²³.

Individual Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships have carried out their own evaluations, but there has been no overall evaluation carried out at policy level. However, the Department is aware of the importance of evaluation and include an

¹⁹ Written Evidence (from DSD) to the Social Development Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration (November 2007)

²⁰ Written Evidence (from DSD) to the Social Development Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration (November 2007)

²¹ Based on Noble Multiple-Deprivation Indicators.

²² People and Place: Implementation Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal in Northern Ireland's Regional Towns and Cities; DSD.

http://monitor.isa/557822516/537878336T0711121333022468642.txt.binXMysM0dapplication/mswordXsysM0dhttp://www.dsdni.gov.uk/imp_plan_neighbourren_for_townsandcities.doc

²³ DSD Corporate Business Plan 2007-2008. <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/dsd-corporate-business-plan-0708.pdf>

evaluation strategy in the Implementation Plan²⁴ which states the importance of baseline statistics to measure the success of projects in the 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy has four interlinking strategic objectives:

- Community Renewal – to develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in their areas.
- Economic Renewal – to develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and connect them to the wider urban economy.
- Social Renewal – to improve social conditions for the people who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods through better co-ordinated public services and the creation of safer environments.
- Physical Renewal – to help create attractive, safe and sustainable environments in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

The Northern Ireland Research Agency's (NISRA)²⁵ Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS)²⁶ has an area dedicated to deprivation indicators in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas²⁷. This site is designed to provide statistical information to show whether levels of persistent poverty have changed in areas where regeneration measures are in place. It includes the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey: Northern Ireland Housing Executive Module 2006²⁸. This will provide a baseline for measuring future community perception in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, but only covers the Neighbourhood Renewal strategic objective relating to Community Renewal.

The 2006 survey for those living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas found that only 15% of respondents living in these areas felt proud of their area when friends or relatives came to visit. This finding compared to 41% of those living in non-Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. When asked if they felt that, overall, their neighbourhood was changing for the better, 35% thought it was compared to 31% in non-Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. However a further 29% thought it was changing for the worse in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas compared to 17% in non-Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

The Implementation Plan²⁹ states that NINIS statistical information on Neighbourhood Renewal Areas will be supplemented with 'neighbourhood surveys' identifying the most pressing issues for the communities. Targets are also to be established and reflected in Departments' Public Service and Service Delivery

²⁴ People and Place: Implementation Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal in Northern Ireland's Regional Towns and Cities; DSD.

http://monitor.isa/557822516/537878336T0711121333022468642.txt.binXMysM0dapplication/mswordXsysM0dhttp://www.dsdni.gov.uk/imp_plan_neighbourren_for_townsandcities.doc

²⁵ Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA)

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/default.asp?cmsid=1&cms=publications&pagesize=10&searchterm=&pageoffset=1&release=&pubtype=0>

²⁶ NINIS <http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/nra/default.asp>

²⁷ As measured using Noble Multiple Deprivation Indicators

²⁸ NINIS Community Well-Being: Neighbourhood Perceptions 2006.

http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/nra/viewData/CommunityWellBeing/Omnibus_Survey/Neighbourhood_Perceptions_2006.xls

²⁹ People and Place: Implementation Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal in Northern Ireland's Regional Towns and Cities; DSD.

http://monitor.isa/557822516/537878336T0711121333022468642.txt.binXMysM0dapplication/mswordXsysM0dhttp://www.dsdni.gov.uk/imp_plan_neighbourren_for_townsandcities.doc

Agreements. To monitor progress a series of key milestones will allow progress against output and outcome measures to be determined and allow information to be gathered on the progress of formation of structures³⁰.

Evaluation and 'Best Practice'

A range of evaluation methodologies have been employed in the evaluation of urban regeneration initiatives. A series of two papers examining evaluation methodology for urban regeneration projects, for example, was written by academics from the University of Ulster's 'Centre for Research on Property and Planning'. The first paper describes a model for the evaluation of urban regeneration projects³¹, while the second includes case-studies of Cathedral Quarter and Laganside conducted in 2003³².

The indicator based methodology for measuring the success of regeneration projects was designed and tested on regeneration projects in Belfast (Laganside and Cathedral Quarter), Dublin (Docklands and Templebar) and Barcelona (Ciutat Vella or Old City and the Olympic Village). The rationale for the case studies was to compare, in the case of Belfast and Dublin, regeneration projects incorporating waterfront and cultural aspects. Five separate indicator sets were used to score regeneration projects which included economy and work, resource use, buildings and land use, transport and mobility and community benefits. The conclusion was that while all the case studies overall fell within the 'good practice' category for urban regeneration, Belfast's scoring would improve as the scheme reached maturity.

Belfast scored poorly on the 'community benefits' key performance indicator. The low score indicated an emphasis on physical development, especially in the early stages of the project and it was concluded that more attention needed to be paid to improving community relations at the outset of regeneration schemes rather than 'being slowly addressed at later phases.'

The British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) used its experience of project evaluation to learn from problems encountered by projects and use them to identify criteria for success³³. BURA presents annual awards to projects that meet the following six key criteria:

1. Demonstrate best rather than good or average practice – encapsulating qualities of innovation, imagination, inspiration and determination and strong partnership working.
2. Act as a catalyst for further regeneration and development in the area, creating a self-sustaining momentum with long-term benefits.
3. Make a positive economic contribution to the overall regeneration of the area, contributing to local employment and being financially viable.

³⁰ People and Place: Implementation Plan for Neighbourhood Renewal in Northern Ireland's Regional Towns and Cities; DSD.
http://monitor.isa/557822516/537878336T0711121333022468642.txt.binXMysM0dapplication/mswordXsysM0dhttp://www.dsdni.gov.uk/imp_plan_neighbourren_for_townsandcities.doc

³¹ 'An Indicator-based Approach to Measuring Sustainable Urban Regeneration Performance: Part 1, Conceptual Foundations and Methodological Framework' Lesley Hemphill, Jim Berry and Stanley McGreal, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No.4, 725 – 755, April 2004.

³² 'An Indicator-based Approach to Measuring Sustainable Urban Regeneration Performance: Part 2, Empirical Evaluation and Case Study Analysis' Lesley Hemphill, Stanley McGreal and Jim Berry, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No.4, 757 – 772, April 2004.

³³ Burwood, S. and Roberts, P. (2002) 'Learning From Experience: The BURA Guide to Achieving Effective and Lasting Regeneration' Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; London.

4. Contribute to community spirit and social cohesion by raising levels of confidence in the long-term living and working environment of the local community and building the capacity of local people to determine their own lives.
5. Contribute to the environmental dimension of sustainable development through the preservation and enrichment of natural resources plus good urban and landscape design. Examples of this include energy efficiency, waste management, use of sustainable building materials and brownfield sites.
6. Have been completed to the point where there is a track record of success (in the case of schemes with long time horizons it is possible to consider stages or phases of such schemes provided the entry makes clear what has been achieved).

BURA conducted a research project re-visiting and tracking a selection of BURA's previous award winners³⁴. The findings focused on making regeneration work for the entire community, identifying lasting solutions and lessons learned. It was found that successful urban regeneration schemes could stimulate and support other initiatives and while the cross-cutting themes of the projects were hard to disentangle, the following were found to be the most important elements for success:

- Creation of new economic activities and employment opportunities;
- Opportunities for training and management of local people in jobs created through urban regeneration initiative;
- Importance of support for community based organisations that can contribute to urban regeneration and the creation of lasting community capacity;
- Promoting culture, leisure and tourist activities as part of the urban regeneration programme, especially if this involves creating jobs, and creating multiplier effects;
- Value of partnerships and the need to promote collaboration for effective planning of urban regeneration;
- Effective management of land and property resources by recycling brownfield sites and ensuring initiatives are designed and implemented in accordance with best practice of environmental management;
- Encourage re-population of central urban areas as residential locations and of creating or improving residential neighbourhoods; and
- Need for urban regeneration to be guided by a clear strategic plan and be a managed process – strategy is an essential pre-condition.

Three key findings emerge from the research:

1. That successful urban regeneration is essentially a product of a broad based partnership that allows a particular initiative to be linked to the long-term delivery of mainstream activities and services; this implies that it is important to embed an urban regeneration scheme or project in the regular local institutional structure as soon as possible.
2. Most successful regeneration initiatives help to deliver a range of environmental, social and economic objectives and, as such, it is reasonable to suggest that urban regeneration can act as a unifying force that can be used to help design and implement sustainable development.
3. Whilst towns and cities can learn much from the experience of urban regeneration elsewhere, it is essential that each individual scheme or project is tailored to fit the individual locality in which it will be implemented.

³⁴ Burwood, S. and Roberts, P. (2002) 'Learning From Experience: The BURA Guide to Achieving Effective and Lasting Regeneration' Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; London.

6.0 Key Engagement Mechanisms

Among the roles of Neighbourhood Renewal Area Partnerships is ensuring that local regeneration takes place within the context of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy to close the gap between deprived areas and other areas. Local communities are to be fully involved in the forming of Neighbourhood partnerships and Action Plans with interventions if necessary where community infrastructure is weak.

Mechanisms for the delivery of town and city centre regeneration schemes are contained in 'Vital and Viable':

At a strategic level an effective partnership between government, district councils, the private sector and the local community will be best placed to deliver the objectives required for making cities and towns vibrant. Councils will become a lead stakeholder in this arrangement.

Town or City Centre Partnerships' role is to ensure broad representation of the local community, oversee development, lead implementation of the strategy at local level, monitor its effectiveness and provide monitoring information to the Department. Town Centre Managers, Council Economic Development Officers and the Department's Development Officers liaise with private developers in town centre regeneration.

7.0 Policy Intervention

This section of the paper looks at two policy interventions which are used outside of Northern Ireland, but which are not employed widely here. These are Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Urban Regeneration Companies.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are 'a business-led strategy where businesses work together and invest collectively in local improvements to their business environment'³⁵.

BIDs based in town centres have helped to create more vibrant and viable town centres which are safer and offer a more attractive environment. This has, in turn, helped to bring in more businesses and reduce the number of commercial properties lying empty, creating more local jobs and attracting greater visitor numbers. In addition, BIDs have helped deliver strong and meaningful partnerships between the private and public sectors which have brought additional investment to support town centre strategies.

BIDs have been in operation throughout the world for nearly 40 years with over 1,400 successfully established. More than 50 are in operation in England. Dunfermline plans to be the first location in Scotland to develop a BID since the launch of the pilot programme by the Scottish Government in 2006. Following legislation in 2004 there are now more than 50 BIDs in England with a further 19 in development. Legislation was passed in ROI in 2006 with Dublin leading the first BID. Between 2006 and 2008 the Scottish Executive is providing approximately £1m to develop the BIDs strategy.

³⁵ Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum <http://www.scotregen.co.uk/news/default.asp?ItemID=661>

Urban Regeneration Companies

Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) are a formal partnership of key representatives of the public and private sector who deliver physical and economic regeneration in specific areas. Having provided a strategic overview of the needs of an area to guide investment decisions by the public and private sector, they involve stakeholders and local businesses and engage with local communities in delivering agreed strategic objectives.

In Northern Ireland Ilex is the only URC in Derry/Londonderry. URCs have been operating successfully in Scotland, England and Wales. The Scottish Executive website states:

Early evaluation of the URC programme in England shows strong evidence that the confidence of the private sector to invest in an area has increased and the programmes themselves are making significant progress in delivering their objectives. This is attributed to the perception of a well-managed area, a commitment from key decision takers to work together and publicly funded early actions to set favourable conditions for growth.

There are currently five Pathfinder URCs in Scotland with the intention to establish a sixth. Each Pathfinder will operate for a period of 10-20 years with funding from the Scottish Executive from 2004 – 2008 of £66 million³⁶.

A Summary Report based on a consultation in Scotland on URCs and published in June 2004 found that:

This consultation process has confirmed that there is general support in Scotland for the establishment of URCs set firmly within a national policy framework and the community planning process. It is clear though that a "one size fits all" approach is not supported and URCs are not seen as a panacea for all regeneration activities but should be considered as one of a selection of tools which can be used to accelerate growth and deliver regeneration. An URC should only be considered where it adds value, there is strong local support and clear agreement amongst partners on outcomes³⁷.

8.0 Examples of 'Good Practice' in Urban Regeneration

Below are brief descriptions of regeneration projects that have been singled out as exhibiting 'best practice' standards³⁸. The first is a project in Belfast that was an award winner for 'best practice'. In terms of scale Scottish projects appear to be most readily comparable to Northern Ireland. A scheme in Falkirk is outlined below, but other examples in Scotland are also highlighted. Within large European cities the potential may exist to identify relatively small scale projects that could be applied in Northern Ireland.

³⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Housing/regeneration-/17735>

³⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/rural/urcsr-00.asp>

³⁸ Source BURA

Belfast

The Ashton Community Trust recently won a 2007 BURA Award for Best Practice in Regeneration. A DSD press release said:

This community-led organisation is taking great strides in tackling poverty and deprivation in one of the most confrontational areas in Northern Ireland. The Trust has seized opportunities to respond to local needs and now owns a range of community buildings employing 100 people, most of whom are local residents. On 30th October the Trust will open a new children's centre, creating 18 jobs and providing over 70 childcare places. The Trust is also developing a derelict block, which was a peace line, to include retail units, community facilities and apartments – the latter of which will be sold to provide the income to build debt-free. This project will regenerate the peace-line and return life to a derelict space³⁹.

Falkirk

Falkirk provides an example of some of the initiatives for regeneration outlined in this paper. Falkirk is a small town that was devastated when BP closed down. However, BP has subsequently invested in the programme 'My Future's in Falkirk'⁴⁰. The Falkirk Wheel acts as a catalyst for regeneration in Falkirk and the area around it. It is an example of the sectors working together.

In December 2002 £23m plan was launched to transform Falkirk and the surrounding area to help local businesses grow and attract companies and visitors to the area and maintain jobs for local people. The economic regeneration plan for the area evolved from the Falkirk Action Plan led by Scottish Enterprise, Forth Valley, BP and Falkirk Council with support from the European Regional Development Fund. The plan focuses on a number of projects which are set to create 4,250 new jobs, stimulate up to £200m additional investment to help local business grow and attract new business to the area and generate £50m a year for the Falkirk economy over the next 10 years.

The three partners involved are providing a significant proportion of the funding; £13m by 2005. A total of £6m is coming from SE Forth Valley, £5m from Falkirk Council and £2m from BP. A further £10m is coming from other public and private sector organisations, including the EU through the East of Scotland Objective 2 programme.

Other examples in Scotland include the Pacific Quay in Glasgow and Leith Docks in Edinburgh. Pacific Quay provides an example of how creating Public Realm can create an area where people can live, work and pursue leisure activities. In contrast, Leith Docks shows what can go wrong when too much space to live is created and not enough for work and leisure.

³⁹ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/news_items/project-in-northern-ireland-celebrates-winning-bura-award.htm

⁴⁰ <http://www.myfuturesinfalkirk.co.uk/vision/Vision.aspx>

European Examples

Bilbao

Bilbao has a population of more than a million. A massive infrastructural transformation and urban regeneration process began in 1998 to turn Bilbao into a service-oriented and culturally attractive city. The flagship of the entire redevelopment, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim-Bilbao Museum, has made international news. The goal was the post-industrial reinvention of the city providing opportunities for tourism-based industries⁴¹.

Lille

Lille is the main city of France's fourth largest metropolitan area. In Lille regeneration has involved investment in culture and transport systems as a means to change mindsets. Originally an industrial, coal mining town, Lille has become an important regional hub with fast trains connecting it to Brussels, Paris and London. It was designated a 'European City of Culture' for 2004.

Rotterdam

The key principles of the Hoogvliet area of Rotterdam renewal process align closely with the sustainable communities approach. The physical regeneration work was always accompanied by strong citizens' participation. This has led to innovative approaches regarding a radical transformation of the area.

Towards the early 1990s, a local political action party grew in importance and became a driving factor behind the ideas on renewal. In 1995, the local government visibly started to try to counter the trends and regenerate the area and improve social cohesion. Starting with a major civic involvement process, an integral, large scale restructuring of Hoogvliet made progress. This included the demolition of outdated housing blocks and their replacement by new housing. Rotterdam Hoogvliet has become a large single regeneration programme, with much attention for tackling social exclusion and poverty, sustainable building principles, attracting new economic activity and creating an attractive living environment⁴².

Malmö, Sweden

The Augustenborg City District Council District in Malmö has a population of one million. Implementation of urban regeneration for the area involving resident involvement included initiatives addressing employment, local transport, local resource systems, a community school and park and an electric road train.

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⁴¹ <http://basque.unr.edu/09/9.3/9.3.57t/9.3.57.03.bilbao.htm>

⁴² http://www.eukn.org/netherlands/themes/Urban_Policy/Urban_environment/Urban_renewal/rotterdam-hoogvliet-bristol-case-study_1071.html