Community Land Scotland welcomes the inquiry the Local Government and Regeneration Committee is undertaking into regeneration policy and is pleased to be able to submit this short evidence paper.

Community Land Scotland represents the interests of Scotland’s community land owners. Collectively they own and manage some 500,000 acres of land and are delivering a range of diversified economic and social developments to build stronger, more sustainable and resilient communities. The majority of the members of Community Land Scotland have come into existence only within the last 15 to 20 years and therefore represent a relatively new type of dynamic community organisation making significant contributions to the development of their respective communities.

Community Land Scotland’s members are mostly rural based, principally from among what have been Scotland’s most disadvantaged rural communities facing long term decline, with few and diminishing economic opportunities, poor housing conditions and a significantly ageing population. The work of community land owners is all about regeneration of the economic and social renewal and growth. Community Land Scotland believes there is a strong read-across between this rural experience and lessons that can be drawn to help inform practise and approaches in the urban context. Too often, we feel, distinctions are drawn between the rural and urban context as if the lessons from one cannot transfer. We believe there are close parallels between the experience of rural and urban in this context.

The community owners are people and organisations with considerable capacity and have shown great determination, initiative and enterprise in achieving what they have so far achieved. They have secured potential for their communities into the long term by taking ownership of vital land and associated assets upon the use of which so much can be achieved. The opportunity of community ownership has released and galvanised capacity that already existed within these communities, but may have lain untapped previously. Their capacity has developed through the experience of securing and managing their land, and they have been greatly assisted in this through important strategic support being made available, principally through Highlands and Islands Enterprise, but also through the Big Lottery in
Scotland, in the form of providing advice and guidance and in securing professional expertise to undertake key tasks, as well as funding. In addition, vital support at key stages of the purchase process has been received from civil servants responsible for administration of provisions of the Land Reform Act.

The ability to secure and take land into community ownership has been considerably strengthened by the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act. This provision in law has changed the nature of debate between communities and landowners, guaranteeing communities certain opportunities. Local people have on-going democratic rights which ensure that community is ultimately in control of its own destiny in matters which relate to the use of its land and associated assets. Our experience is that when people are empowered to act, when they are given the opportunity to take control of vital assets, they are motivated and can find insightful and enterprising ways to secure progress for their communities, very often in ways which have eluded other forms of development intervention. **Appropriate legal rights to assist community regeneration are a potentially vital part of the policy framework for local regeneration strategy.**

It is against this background that Community Land Scotland welcomes and supports the possibilities represented by the ideas in developing the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill (CERB) and we believe this Bill forms a centrally important part of future regeneration strategy delivery. Our detailed evidence to the Community Empowerment and Renewal bill consultation can be found at www.communitylandscotland.org.uk as can our evidence to the Land Reform Review Group. Both these documents set out in some detail thinking on what might make more regeneration more successful and sustainable.

Before addressing a number of the questions set out in the call for evidence we believe it is important to make a general point about **how much trust we invest in local communities** generally in our society and whether there is any further underpinning needed on to how thinking may develop for the future. As alluded to above, the new generation of community land owners are demonstrating that, given the right conditions, local community organisations are capable of achieving the most remarkable things, and doing so competently and professionally, and demonstrating a great deal of responsibility, enterprise and initiative. The increasing number of development trusts and community woodland owners could be said to be demonstrating exactly similar characteristics. Housing Associations could be said to have been demonstrating very similar features for a longer period of time. However, our experience is that it is very hard for many people, policy makers and businesses and more widely, until they see it first hand, to understand it is possible for community organisations to tackle and deliver the kind of significant developments they are delivering. People who learn of what is happening are for the most part genuinely surprised and highly impressed by what they discover, having never thought community organisations would have the capacity or be capable of doing what they are now doing. It would appear that at a societal and governmental level,
we do not have a widely held belief that communities can deliver large and complex projects and display high levels of competence. It is as if we rather associate ‘community’ as always small scale, marginal, non-commercial, and tending to the amateur. Yet recent experience contradicts this. It is time that recent experience informed a new policy approach which positively seeks out greater community control, and this is very much in the spirit of the CERB thinking and proposals. In recent evidence Community Land Scotland gave to the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee in relation to potential reform of the Crown Estate, we advanced the principle of **subsidiarity as a guiding principle**. In the context of the further work on CERB and more widely in government we believe adopting the principle of subsidiarity has a role to play in explicitly underpinning further thinking and policy development. This in turn would help facilitate in the local context other important guiding principles, of self-determination, of local people leading the finding of solutions to their challenges, of communities having rights, and that the ownership of assets provides a basis for the generation of income streams to help secure a sustainable future.

Further, **local community ownership of assets can be a powerful vehicle for tackling wider social inequalities** by bringing new opportunity to disadvantaged communities. Part of the explicit policy purpose of promoting wider asset ownership should be about addressing inequalities and seeking greater social justice in Scotland.

**Strategy and Policy Issues**

It will be important that, while allowing for important distinct developments and approaches suited to the urban and the rural context, such an approach is not allowed to mask important common ground between the urban and rural regeneration.

At present, responsibility for regeneration sits as shared responsibility between the national development agencies, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the local authorities, Scottish Government, and the third sector. Beyond this public realm, the private sector has a part to play, though it should be noted that regeneration strategy has its most important place where the private markets have or are failing to deliver. It would seem clear that, looking forward, all will continue to have important parts to play, but the underpinning strategies and policy context requires to be joined up. This points to the continuing need for the Scottish Government to draw together the key interest in a strategic forum to seek to align policy approaches and the identification of areas where policy needs to develop. At the more local level Community Planning, with all its imperfections, none-the-less must be central to more localised and joined-up delivery into the future.
There is little doubt that over the past half century the Highlands and Islands has benefited from the work of the Highlands and Islands Development Board and its successor Highlands and Islands Enterprise. In their work these agencies have been significantly aided in what they are able to do, and in the culture of community empowerment it has delivered through the specific social development powers they have in statute, in addition to economic powers analogous to Scottish Enterprise. It remains odd that the powers that have brought evident success are not more widely available in Scotland.

While it would no doubt be possible to pursue physical, social and economic regeneration as separate entities, this would be to deny the very close, indeed, the intertwining, nature of these matters. Where community owners excel is by linking all three and using activity in one dimension to support and deliver outcomes in another. These strands of regeneration ought to be seen as indivisible.

It is not possible for Community Land Scotland to pass judgement on whether best value is being obtained for current investment or achieving maximum impact. However, we are clear that to really turn around economic performance of particular places and thus strengthen social co-hesion and sustainability, local areas should be in control and have ownership of as much of the local asset base as they can. To this extent, policy on the use of resources for regeneration needs to support as a central concern local communities taking that control. To this extent at least, any split between available capital and resource spending needs to be kept under review to permit as much capital spending as may be necessary to put local people in the driving seat of local regeneration.

**Partnership Working**

See comments above on Community Planning Partnerships and the capital and revenue spending split.

To promote sustainability, we believe that ownership and control of local land and assets needs to be seen as central to future strategy. Regeneration needs to be long term and beyond the notion of a `project’. The long term management and control of key drivers of the local economy need to be in local hands if they are to be really sustainable, with local people controlling and driving developments, albeit in partnership with whatever partners they may determine.

**Practical Issues**

Community capacity building is an important dimension of helping achieve future success. However, this needs to be based on a firmer recognition that a huge amount of capacity already exists in every community, if it can be liberated through the right circumstances. In this sense we believe capacity in specific technical and governance and skills can be increased by important supported inputs from
development agencies, local authorities and others. There is much expertise in this already in the work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, for example, as well as Big.

The call for evidence asks the question what Community Planning Partnerships can do in supporting community regeneration. At root they could adopt some of the underlying principles outlined above – of subsidiarity, of local self-determination, of local people leading, of communities having rights, and that the ownership of assets provides a basis for the generation of income streams to help secure a sustainable future. By believing and trusting more in the capacity of their communities, they could see their role as enabling and facilitating through a range of programmes and funding stream to allow more self-determination locally, and by then, possibly, by keeping out of the way as much as possible.

In seeking to measure the outcomes of regeneration strategy it is important to look at the hard measures – jobs created, houses renovated or built, carbon use reductions, the physical look of a place, slowing or halting population decline, and so on. However, other less tangible measures are also important in understanding the likelihood of a community to survive and prosper into the longer term. These might be issues around confidence, community safety, sense of well-being, and so on. We have no specific prescription but are confident an appropriate basket of measure could be developed which would meet with approval and help measure success.

Community Land Scotland

March 2013