SUBMISSION FROM ORKNEY ISLANDS COUNCIL

What does ‘regeneration’ mean in your area?

1. Regeneration is about revitalising communities, improving quality of life for residents and stemming depopulation. Orkney has a strong tradition for a community-led approach to regeneration with a significant number of active and ambitious Community Trusts developing and implementing their own Island plans with OIC and HIE assistance.

2. In a rural context regeneration may take the form of a relatively low cost project such as the building of two houses in North Ronaldsay, one of the most isolated communities in the Country where the ability to attract families with school age children to move to the island is all important in sustaining local services and critically the school.

http://www.northronaldsaytrust.co.uk/

3. In addition Community-led wind turbine projects are at various stages of funding and development with some examples where significant revenues are already offering to support a range of local community interest projects seeking to strengthen and regenerate the local area

4. In our towns regeneration tends to incur greater costs due to the fact that buildings that have fallen into disrepair also have planning constraints or listing restrictions that require more expensive solutions than might otherwise have been the case. A case in point is the very recently reopened former Commercial Hotel in Stromness.


5. The Stromness Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (part of a broader Townscape Heritage Initiative is an excellent example of how regeneration can be effective in a remote / rural location with the investment of £4.1m over a 4 year period.

The regeneration strategy, resources and funding

6. We are not aware of any applications to these funds by any service in the Council and are only aware of a single application being made to the People and Communities Fund from the wider community which would suggest that the funds are not sufficiently well signposted.

7. To date Government regeneration funds have been focussed on urban, lowland and upland regeneration projects in the most deprived areas of Scotland based on Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), levels of vacant and derelict land and property, and worklessness statistics. Orkney by these standards is not very
deprived in comparison but there is still disadvantage, fuel poverty and fragile local economies particularly in the Outer Isles. Whilst the Scottish Government’s Regeneration Strategy recognises that Local Authorities are well placed to coordinate economic development and regeneration activity it is not yet clear what the shape and nature of the new Regeneration Capital Grant will be. Whilst there is some expectation that priorities for large scale transformational change projects will remain it is important that the case for all councils to have the opportunity to access the funds is made.

Regeneration, equalities and preventative spending

8. The recommendations of the Christie Commission focused on both preventative spending and integration of services. Orkney, alongside the other island councils, submitted a proposal for full integration of local public services, the further exploration of which was endorsed by the Commission. Local control of services is important to maintaining the sustainability of Orkney, a key aim of regeneration. Support for this agenda would contribute to both regeneration and the delivery of the Christie recommendations.

9. The simplest way to ensure that regeneration policy assists with the delivery of the equalities agenda is to include conditions to the funding criteria for projects receiving support to demonstrate that the regeneration projects will be accessible to all. However, it is important that the assessment of equalities impact is not restricted to the protected groups within the Equality Act 2010. In Orkney, peripherality is a significant barrier to accessing goods and services, and a vital factor to consider in maintaining the sustainability of our isles communities.

10. Regeneration policy will have to be developed against the backdrop of the UK Government’s forthcoming welfare reform. Aspects of this reform are likely to have a negative effect on the most vulnerable people within our community and will have particular impacts on our most remote communities. For example, historically, when building social housing in the outer islands larger houses have been built as part of a deliberate policy to encourage families to move to the island. The Housing Benefit under-occupancy reform will mean that housing choices for people in the islands will be limited and they may have to leave their home, their family and island community. This will make it more difficult to attract people to move to houses such as those in North Ronaldsay referred to previously.

11. It is also relevant to note that the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is an unreliable measure of deprivation in remote, rural communities such as Orkney, where deprivation tends to be disseminated and does not show up on the Index. It should not, therefore, be used to drive decision-making when developing policy which will impact on the sustainability of remote and island areas.

Regeneration and sustainable economic development
12. There is evidence of economic development taking place in the Marine Renewables field in Orkney with both wave and tidal power developers making moves to establish local offices and exploring the possibility of manufacturing/assembly facilities in the area. This has been greatly helped through the Council’s investment in pier infrastructure with partnership funding from the Scottish Government and ERDF.

13. Unfortunately 2012 has also seen the demise of two flagship businesses in the Orkney Food and Drink sector both of which suffered from cash flow difficulties before their demise:-

  o Orkney Meat Ltd - A tough market coupled with very strict waste disposal regulations and high transport costs made the business model uneconomic.

  o Orkney Herring Ltd - reliance on replacing/securing supermarket contracts led to the closure of the company and the loss of an excellent product range.

14. The reluctance of banks to provide overdraft facilities or business loans and forcing their customers down the route of invoice financing with significant fees and breakage costs has been a significant impediment to economic development.

**Community led regeneration and CPPs**

15. There is strong evidence in Orkney that Community led regeneration works. This has been led by the local Development Trusts and Community Councils with support from Orkney Community Planning Partnership (OCPP). The Fairer Scotland Fund, which was distributed locally by OCPP, was targeted mainly towards equalities but in the process contributed significantly towards regeneration, demonstrating the close connection between the two strands.

16. The Orkney local Development Trusts have been following the model pioneered in Orkney by the Westray Development Trust in procuring a community wind turbine that will provide a funding stream for the Development Trust that will then be able to underwrite or match fund other funding sources on local projects.

http://www.westraydevelopmenttrust.co.uk/

http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/I0HDT/documents/newsletter/the_blether_feb2012.pdf

http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/SHAPINSAY/index.asp?pageid=1273

17. The OCPP’s Partnership Liaison Group recently carried out a self-evaluation of the Partnership’s policy review and development as part of its ongoing “How good is our community planning partnership?” programme. Some areas for improvement were identified, but in the main the Partnership found that its processes were robust and its shared policies were inclusive and well supported by partners.
18. Orkney’s current recent Single Outcome Agreement 2011-14 includes the following local priorities under national outcome 11, Strengthening Communities:

- Maintain our isles populations
- Support sustainable local development
- Support social enterprise
- Develop the role of the Third Sector

19. Performance indicators for this section are:

- % of adult residents stating their neighbourhood is a “very good” or “fairly good” place to live
- Number of people newly registered to volunteer
- Number and proportion of Orkney residents living in the Outer Isles
- Total external funding levered into communities via island development trusts and other Third Sector organisations
- Total external funding levered into communities via LEADER funds
- Number of social enterprises

20. In addition, the SOA includes priorities and indicators relating to key business and employment targets, relevant to regeneration, under national outcomes 1 and 2.

**Regeneration and climate change targets**

21. The model being followed by Orkney’s local development trusts of erecting community wind turbines to provide an income stream will through the renewable electricity generated be making a significant contribution to climate change targets. In addition some community trusts such as Rousay Egilsay and Wyre have stated sustainable development at the core of their plan with an emphasis on a reduced carbon footprint E.g. The aims of Rousay, Egilsay & Wyre Development Trust

22. The overarching aim of the REWDT is to improve the quality of life for the islands inhabitants of all ages, in ways that are both sustainable and environmentally sound.

23. The vision of the trust from 2011 to 2025 is to strive for

- A balanced population of all ages
- Vibrant economic activity with a range of job opportunities on the islands
- Increased population
- A range of affordable housing options
- Regular and affordable transport on and between the islands and between the islands and the Orkney mainland
- Self-sufficiency in energy, resources, and vital services.
- Good community facilities such as schools, health, sports, postal services,
shops and hospitality trades [measurable targets]
- Promotion of our islands resources and produce
- Enhanced local care for our elderly
- Improved facilities for our youngsters
- Maximised benefits of tourism within the ecological limits of our islands

Orkney Islands Council