

# **The Groundwork movement**

## **Its role in neighbourhood renewal**

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# Key terms

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BEA	Business Environment Association	RDA	Regional Development Agency
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (renamed Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions following the 2001 General Election, but was DETR for the period of this study)	RSL	Registered Social Landlord
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (renamed Department for Education and Skills following the 2001 General Election, but was DfEE for the period of this study)	SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	SME	Small to Medium sized Enterprise
GOR	Government Office for the Region	SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
ILM	Intermediate Labour Market	TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
LSC	Learning Skills Council	WDA	Welsh Development Agency
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership	<b>The case studies</b>	
NDC	New Deal for Communities	GBC	Groundwork Black Country
NOF	New Opportunities Fund	GDV	Groundwork Dearne Valley
NRU	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit	GEL	Groundwork East Lancashire
NSNR	National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal	GM	Groundwork Merton
		GMRCT	Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taff
		GMS	Groundwork Medway Swale
		GMVR	Groundwork Macclesfield and Vale Royal
		GNI	Groundwork Northern Ireland

# Executive summary

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## Introduction to the study

GFA Consulting and the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned to undertake a study of the Groundwork movement, in order to identify the impact of Trusts' interventions, and factors which affect their long-term survival and 'sustainability'. The study mainly involved a detailed examination of projects in eight case study Trusts. These had to have commenced at least three years ago, have some lasting impact, and include activities relevant to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR).

The study coincided with the development of the national strategy, which seeks to regenerate the country's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Similarities between the strategy and the Groundwork approach include: a focus on small, clearly defined neighbourhoods suffering multiple disadvantage; addressing multiple objectives; and working with local people. This study illuminates Groundwork's contribution to the neighbourhood agenda, and shows how it can respond to the new challenges.

The study aims to assess the durability of Groundwork interventions, an issue critical to the wider policy agenda, but the notion of 'sustainability' in this context is fraught with difficulty. All interviewees thought that change in deprived neighbourhoods can only be achieved in the very long term. While housing policy concentrates the most vulnerable in particular neighbourhoods, high and continuing levels of support will be necessary. Groundwork believes that it should not become a permanent fixture, but staff know that the communities where they work require long-term involvement.

## Groundwork: its role in neighbourhood renewal

In most of the cases in the study, Trusts have chosen the most difficult terrain, unlike other agencies that consider capacity and opportunity as well as need. Focusing on the neediest areas demands long-term commitment and complicates the task of testing for sustainability.

Generally Trusts seek to engage local communities in determining local priorities, though sometimes these are dictated by the availability of funding, or skills in the Groundwork team. Initial actions are frequently environmental, and although important, are often seen as a route to engaging in broader community development. Wider strategy development, working with residents and local agencies to determine broader priorities, rarely happens without a lengthy period of capacity building.

Groundwork's activities are diverse, focusing on People-based programmes, improving Places and promoting Prosperity, although in practice there is much interaction between them. Programmes devised by Trusts display flexibility, reflecting a culture less constrained by bureaucracy than local government. Trusts emphasise the need to act as a catalyst; we found few examples where Groundwork had moved from an area: the *role* may change, but the comfort of a presence remains.

There are limited systems for project development, appraisal, or approval. A few Trusts are now developing systematic internal procedures but there is little evidence of rigorous approaches to baseline measurement, target setting or evaluation, or to disseminating the lessons of Groundwork practice.

All Groundwork activities stress the importance of maximising community involvement, reflecting the need to rebuild capacity where local confidence and self-esteem have been destroyed. A lack of social or institutional capital characterises these environments. The relative absence of initiatives within some case study areas suggests a high degree of additionality – before Groundwork intervened nothing much happened.

Groundwork’s approach to engaging communities reflects some key principles which include:

- substantial investment in the *processes* of community engagement
- working through existing institutions rather than inventing new ones
- using initial physical environmental improvements to draw local residents into the Groundwork/ community loop
- always using informal and accessible language.

Stimulating community involvement is one thing, keeping it going another. We found Groundwork committed to working with communities long term. This emphasis is appropriate, as policy guidance stresses the need to involve local communities, although it assumes that communities have the capacity and appetite for continuing inputs. A number of themes in the Groundwork approach have important lessons for the wider policy community.

- *Engaging with different sectors in the community.* The study shows how Groundwork tries to reconcile the views of different constituencies, including

young people and the local business community.

- *Conflict resolution.* Community consultation rarely leads to consensus. Focusing on environmental improvements may engage residents, but they may not agree about what is needed. Trusts try to address tensions but they can be directive, recognising that not all constituencies will receive exactly what they want.
- *Enhancing community capacity.* Sustainable area regeneration depends on enhanced community capacity, which requires investment in community development. There are some genuine innovations: the Stewardship Model in Dearne Valley helps both sustain community involvement and draw other agencies into longer-term commitments.
- *The individualisation of the community.* Capacity building is usually seen as essentially collective or institutional. But it can also reflect individual success stories and Trusts appear well-placed to help develop individuals.

The study shows examples of programmes which cross policy agendas. It is accepted that social exclusion must be attacked through co-ordinated programmes, but it is hard to achieve because of funding complexities, inter-agency tensions, and the ‘silo’ mentality. Groundwork is particularly effective in helping create a holistic approach to area regeneration, through focusing multi-agency activity on a community centre, or integrating different policy agendas.

Is it possible to assess the impact and effectiveness of these interventions? There are

inherent difficulties in measuring impacts, but some are specific to Groundwork. Trusts are reluctant (or unable) to undertake detailed data capture or to establish robust baselines. All the Trusts are clear that sustainable improvement is exceptionally difficult given the scale of available resources. So what can we say about the impacts of Groundwork interventions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods?

- *Project activity.* There is an impressive range of project activity, which generally would not have happened without Groundwork's involvement, because of its readiness to work where other agencies do not go.
- *Enhancing the value activities of others.* There are numerous examples where its distinctive contributions have been developed alongside other programmes.
- *Creating neighbourhood partnerships.* Groundwork typically brings in other partners and helps build partnership.
- *Stronger communities.* Community organisations and their capacity to influence decisions are stronger because of Groundwork's presence.
- *Finance raised for future activities.* Trusts are effective at tapping into funding streams and in identifying potential sources for future activities.
- *Improved confidence and self-esteem.* There is greater confidence about neighbourhoods because of Groundwork programmes.
- *Changed behaviour by partners.* Critically, Groundwork's influence over other

agencies extends beyond the immediate neighbourhood.

### **Groundwork: its role within partnerships**

Partnership working has been embedded in the culture of regeneration in this country for many years. The government expects the NSNR to generate radical changes in partnership activity, because of its emphasis on the better co-ordination of main programme expenditure. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are expected to influence how individual partner agencies spend mainstream resources. Its ability to influence main programme budgets is a critical test of Groundwork's effectiveness in partnership working in the new policy environment.

All those working close to Groundwork projects are clear that partnership working is essential for effective and sustainable regeneration programmes. There is an emphasis on involving the local community, which itself has ramifications for partnership working at wider spatial levels. It is accepted that Trusts cannot do everything, and that change requires different agencies to embrace common goals in a framework largely set by local needs and aspirations. The scale of multi-agency involvement in Groundwork activity is often striking, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, and includes most local government departments, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), further education colleges, transport operators, the police, local businesses, charities, housing associations, English Partnerships, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the Benefits Agency, and community and voluntary groups.



Groundwork's contribution to partnership development is perceived positively, based on a number of considerations:

- Groundwork is seen as able to 'get things off the ground' more quickly and more effectively than most other agencies, most of the time.
- This is often rooted in partners' experience of Trusts being able to raise funding resources, with little apparent difficulty.
- Its attitude to project development is popular; it is seen as more risk-taking than other organisations.
- Because of the way Trusts relate to local communities: as a senior local government officer said, 'Groundwork does what we should be doing'.

There are differences in the perspective adopted by more senior managers in local government and their middle managers or field workers. At the top, Groundwork appears to offer a way of pursuing 'modernising' agendas surrounding Best Value. However, those responsible for the delivery of services locally take a less enthusiastic view of local Trusts.

There are variations in Groundwork's ability to deal effectively with the private sector. There are long-standing relationships with some large companies, but not all Trusts know how to make best use of private sector expertise. One Trust chair (from the private sector) thought the organisation's culture and even language is 'impenetrable to the business community'.

Partnership working raises a number of important considerations for Groundwork.

Effective partnership working requires complex interpersonal skills. Many local staff have, or are acquiring such skills. But for many staff Groundwork is a training opportunity and a stepping stone to other things. As a result invaluable expertise is being lost to the organisation.

There are major differences, depending on the locality, in the nature of the partnership task facing local Trusts. In some places Groundwork can play a significant, and often lead role where there are few 'competitors'. But it is self-evidently more difficult where there are many players and extensive regeneration experience. This may affect where Groundwork gets a seat on the LSP, which is crucial if it is to exert sustained influence on other players.

Because of the informal remit of many partnerships it is not possible to specify the impact of Trusts on partnerships. Nevertheless it is possible to identify a typology which outlines the range of Trust interventions we encountered:

- Trusts like Groundwork East Lancashire have helped to create or have themselves been instrumental in forming partnerships.
- In other cases Trusts have worked with others to extend the constitution and remit of partnerships.
- Trusts have improved partnership outputs: Groundwork Dearne Valley worked with local communities, local authorities and others to create a legal agreement underpinning its Stewardship Model to secure long-term sustainability of environmental improvements.

## The Groundwork movement

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- Elsewhere the active involvement of Trusts within partnerships has helped to influence the behaviour and attitudes of others.

What characterises the effective engagement of Trusts within the wider institutional context?

- Openness to new ideas and initiatives: Groundwork Manchester successfully tendered to undertake environmental and physical development work for the local New Deal for Communities (NDC) Partnership.
- Bringing to the table direct experience of local projects and programmes.
- An ability to engage with a wide range of organisations and individuals.
- A willingness to stick with partnerships: stamina and persistence.

### **Groundwork: strategic development, leadership and innovation**

The national policy framework within which Groundwork operates is changing. Devolution has given new powers to elected institutions in Northern Ireland and Wales. There is a 'regional dimension' to governance in England, through the RDAs and the prospect of regional elected assemblies. Local authorities are increasingly shifting from a direct delivery to an enabling mode of operation. Third-sector agencies like Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and community development Trusts are increasingly involved in the delivery of regeneration. Groundwork has played a role in the development of many of these policies, though in some areas more than others:

- There were two Groundwork representatives on the Advisory Task Force for the New Deal, where Groundwork was influential.
- Groundwork organised consultation events for the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) on the draft neighbourhood renewal strategy, aimed at local communities.
- It has influenced the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in relation to Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) mechanisms, which have now become much more widespread.
- In both Wales and Northern Ireland, Groundwork has established strategic influence within the newly created directly elected assemblies.

In both Wales and Northern Ireland, Groundwork has successfully established itself at the heart of the policy-making process. Groundwork Wales has established a role as mouthpiece for the Welsh Trusts: in lobbying the Assembly, and sitting on advisory committees (for Objective 1 funding, New Deal for the Unemployed, and European funded environmental business services). In Northern Ireland the approach has been similar, and Groundwork Northern Ireland has raised its profile to influence policy development. This has involved meetings with each major party leader, attendance at recent party conferences, and regular visits to Stormont. It also led an alliance of key public agencies in a successful bid to the New Opportunities Fund.

The RDAs are now established and their role to some extent has been clarified. Both Groundwork UK and individual Trusts are

aware of the need to engage with these regional institutions. However, there are variations in the extent to which Groundwork Trusts engage with the key regional agencies, in part reflecting the current spread of Trusts geographically and the regional structures that have been adopted. It is anticipated that in the near future every region in England will have a regional resource, designed to ensure that Groundwork is embedded within the regional framework of institutions.

Trusts are widely involved in local regeneration partnerships where the key actor is usually the local authorities, which are strongly represented on the Trust Boards. But in some areas the desire of local authorities to retain their traditional controlling role has made the establishment, let alone the operation, of individual Trusts difficult. Nevertheless, where it has a presence, Groundwork is generally well received in the regeneration sphere. There are potential synergies between what Trusts are doing locally and strategic issues which the new LSPs will be addressing. However, Groundwork cannot necessarily expect a seat everywhere at what are likely to prove crowded LSP tables. It should be a priority for many Trusts to try to ensure that they are.

The study reveals substantial influence over many aspects of national policy, particularly in view of the relatively modest resources at Groundwork's disposal – as one senior interviewee said, 'Groundwork is good at punching above its weight'.

## Directions, conclusions and recommendations

Identifying impacts for an organisation like Groundwork is not straightforward, and a comparison between inputs and outcomes may not always be helpful. We can summarise our analysis of Groundwork's strengths and weaknesses as follows:

### 1 *Strengths*

- capacity to develop trust in neglected communities
- demonstrable staff commitment
- local flexibility and independence of action
- an organisation that gets on with things
- capacity to raise funds
- understands the policy process and how to influence policy makers
- a co-operative rather than competitive ethos
- ability to join it all up locally
- willingness to go to neighbourhoods that others won't go to.

### 2 *Weaknesses*

- lack of administrative rigour
- relative inattention to monitoring
- inadequate attention to equal opportunity issues
- insufficient attention to marketing and publicity, especially locally
- uneven links to the private sector.

The neighbourhood renewal strategy offers major opportunities to Groundwork, but there are also threats:

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- Other organisations (such as RSLs, for example) are looking for ways to address the neighbourhood renewal agenda and thus occupy Groundwork's 'territory'.
- Demands for staff will be substantial, and opportunities elsewhere could attract existing Groundwork staff.
- Changes in funding regimes could affect Groundwork's ability to continue with some of its current activities.

### Lessons and recommendations

#### 1 *Policy-makers and funders*

- Rebuilding neighbourhoods long neglected is a long-term process.
- Lengthy lead-in times are needed to equip communities to engage in strategy development.
- Even where there has been community development and capacity building, vulnerable communities need support in the long term.
- These processes impose limits on the speed with which impacts on programme outcomes can be achieved.
- Much of Groundwork's activity shows the need to tackle small pockets of deprivation in otherwise affluent districts.
- Groundwork's experience of community-based neighbourhood renewal will be of great value as the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) develops the Skills and Knowledge Strategy.
- Similarly the experience will be of value to Local Strategic Partnerships

(LSPs), even where Groundwork is not a member.

#### 2 *Local authorities and other local partners*

- Local authorities could make greater use of Groundwork's capacity and reputation as 'neutral intermediary' – in brokering negotiations on the establishment of LSPs for example.
- The environment is a powerful tool through which to engage disenchanted communities.
- A flexible approach, free of bureaucratic constraints, is essential if disaffected communities are to be re-engaged.
- Quick fixes will not work: all those involved in renewing disadvantaged communities have to commit for the long term.

#### 3 *Groundwork*

- The messages from the study from Groundwork are extremely positive: interviewees were almost unanimously enthusiastic about the quality and effectiveness of Groundwork activities.
- Nevertheless some – internally as well as externally – felt there was scope for greater consistency of standards.
- Trusts should start to develop 'exit strategies' to plan for the loss of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding.
- Where Groundwork overlaps with the 88 neighbourhood renewal target districts, Trusts need to develop local strategies to maximise influence, even where they are not full members of LSPs.

- Greater effort should go into publicising the scope of Groundwork activities – by local Trusts as well as Groundwork UK.
  - Groundwork must ensure it maintains internal capacity by:
    - matching staff specifications to the new agenda
    - ensuring staff development opportunities enable staff to keep abreast of the policy changes
- increasing the proportion of local people employed in neighbourhood renewal.
  - Groundwork needs to review its approach to neighbourhood working, to clarify the circumstances where a long-term presence is required and justified.



# 1 Introduction to the study

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## Objectives and methods

GFA Consulting and the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University have been commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Groundwork Federation to undertake a study of the Groundwork movement. The study's main aim was to assess factors that help or hinder the effectiveness and impact of Groundwork and the separate local Trusts, and in particular, to identify what makes Groundwork interventions sustainable (i.e. long-lasting). The evaluation has sought to assess both *what* survives and *how*.

The study included a series of focus groups with Groundwork staff, and interviews with funders, partners, and stakeholders. However at its heart was a series of projects in eight case study Trusts, chosen according to criteria that included:

- commencement at least three years before the study
- a clear 'neighbourhood' focus to the activity
- decision-making involving neighbourhood representatives
- addressing objectives relevant to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR)
- evidence of positive and sustainable improvements as a result of the activity.

## The Groundwork structure

The Groundwork movement was founded in 1981 by the Countryside Commission (a government agency), with the establishment of

the first local Trust, at St Helens. It mainly focused on issues concerning the urban fringe, access to the countryside, and reclaiming derelict land. During the 1980s a further 20 or so Trusts were established, all largely concentrating on this explicitly environmental agenda.

The early 1990s however witnessed a substantial broadening of Groundwork activity, in terms of the number of local Trusts and the breadth of their aims and objectives, reflecting a shift from the Countryside Commission to the Department of the Environment's Regeneration Division. By 1994 the number of Trusts had doubled. There are now 39 Trusts in England, and five in Wales and Northern Ireland. Their agenda also expanded, to embrace a wider range of issues associated with regeneration, including estate regeneration, education and training, business advice, and community capacity building. For most of our case study Trusts, their central concern is with tackling economic, cultural, physical and social exclusion. Environmental activities, though important, are seen by many as a means to an end.

A unique feature of Groundwork's structure is its hybrid nature. It was established by central government and is treated as a grant in aid organisation. It is a charity, both locally (the Trusts) and nationally. Each Trust is owned by the local authorities within whose areas it operates and the national part of Groundwork. The Trusts must survive by developing and funding projects which meet the needs of local stakeholders, with some subsidy to the development process from the central government grant (50 per cent for new Trusts, falling to below 5 per cent for well established ones).

Many interviewees suggested that it would be wrong to think that this new orientation marked a complete break with the past. The earliest Trusts harnessed the energies of volunteers (including the unemployed) to achieve environmental improvements, and stressed the importance of developing a local sense of ownership. Nevertheless, the recent development of the Groundwork agenda has paralleled, and contributed to, the national regeneration agenda. Growth in the *scale* of Groundwork activities has inevitably brought its own challenges. Recent expansion – allied with relatively high levels of staff turnover – means that more than 50 per cent of Groundwork staff have been with the organisation for less than two years.

Over the past two years there has also been a substantial reorganisation of Groundwork, reflecting changes in the organisation's size and priorities. A federal structure was formally adopted in 2000, with local Trusts appointing a majority of representatives to the Board of the Groundwork Federation. The formal adoption of a federal structure is recent, but local Trusts have always acted with a high degree of autonomy, each separately incorporated and holding staff employment contracts. This local independence is a source of strength but imposes constraints on the centre's capacity to influence what goes on locally. One of the most important challenges facing Groundwork UK is to manage the next phase of growth within a structure that encourages and indeed demands local freedom of manoeuvre.

### The policy context

This evaluation has coincided with the development of the NSNR, launched by the Prime Minister in January 2001 as *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). This seeks to regenerate the country's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in relation to five key policy areas – worklessness, crime, education and skills, health, and housing and the environment – both by establishing 'floor targets' and by closing the gap between the most deprived and the rest. The strategy is to be implemented through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), on which representatives of local communities are expected to have a significant voice.

The objectives of the neighbourhood renewal strategy, and the methods by which these are to be achieved, resonate with much Groundwork experience. Local Trusts typically seek to tackle most, if not all, of the aims of the national strategy. They do so by focusing on small, clearly defined neighbourhoods, and above all by working with those who live there. This study confirms that underpinning virtually all Groundwork activity is the insistence on developing local communities in order to help sustain regeneration in the longer term.

The timing of this study is therefore apposite, for a variety of reasons:

- It describes Groundwork's long-standing experience in tackling dimensions of the neighbourhood agenda.
- It identifies good practice that accounts for the durability of Groundwork interventions, which will be of value to



those designing and implementing neighbourhood renewal strategies.

- It offers suggestions about how Groundwork can respond to the challenges and opportunities of the new neighbourhood agenda.

### What is sustainability?

A central aim of the study is to assess the durability of Groundwork interventions. For at least the past 20 years, UK regeneration policy has been predicated on the assumption that injecting relatively modest resources into areas of disadvantage for relatively short periods can help sustain longer-term regeneration. The issue of what survives and why is therefore of critical importance to the wider policy agenda.

However, as others have suggested, the notion of 'sustainability' in this context is fraught with difficulty (Evans and Fordham, 2000). There is little consensus about what it means, how it might be identified, or even whether it is achievable in our most disadvantaged communities. Virtually all of those interviewed in this study thought that changing the most deprived neighbourhoods was not possible except in the long term. This reflects a view that as long as the housing market and social landlords' lettings policies continue to concentrate the most vulnerable members of society in particular neighbourhoods, high and continuing levels of support will be necessary. One inner city Trust Executive Director described estates that effectively acquire a new generation of residents every five years.

There are important practical consequences here for Groundwork. A powerful component of the Groundwork philosophy is that it is a catalyst for others, and should not seek to become a permanent fixture in neighbourhoods where it intervenes. However, in a number of areas, Groundwork staff told us that they are under no illusion that the communities where they work may need their involvement over a long period of time.

### This report

This report sets out the findings of this evaluation, and includes:

- A brief pen-picture of the eight case study Trusts.
- A review of the operation of Groundwork at local level, to assess its role in neighbourhood renewal.
- An assessment of Groundwork's role within, and influence over, regeneration partnerships and the partners within them.
- An examination of Groundwork's wider contribution to strategy and policy development.
- Conclusions and recommendations emerging from the study, aimed at local government, policy-makers and funders, others involved in neighbourhood renewal, and finally, Groundwork itself.

## 2 The case studies

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### Groundwork Black Country (GBC)

GBC covers the metropolitan boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. It is also active in other areas, including Telford and Cannock, through a subsidiary services company. The Trust is in its twelfth year of operation and has a staff of almost 80 (including secondees and graduate volunteers).

GBC has grown more than tenfold in both turnover and staff numbers. Its 2000–01 programme involves over £2.5m expenditure, with income largely drawn from SRB, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Employment Service (New Deal), the Environment Agency, English Partnerships, local health authorities, the National Lottery and limited private sector funding.

Its strategic mission is ‘to bring about sustainable improvements, through partnerships, to the local environment and to contribute to economic and social regeneration’. To achieve this it is seeking to develop and expand existing areas of activity by:

- increasing numbers on its training for employment schemes (including Intermediate Labour Markets [ILMs]), particularly young people from ethnic minority communities
- in partnership with local residents, drawing up action plans for neighbourhood renewal in nine ‘areas of focus’, based on community engagement and capacity-building, and linking environmental, education and health dimensions
- developing its work with schools, including a range of IT and energy

projects, Safe Routes to Schools, and personal development programmes for disaffected youth

- contributing to primary prevention and healthy living programmes in partnership with local firms, communities, schools, health authorities, local authorities and voluntary agencies, and linking in with Health Action Zones and Health Promotion Units
- promoting environmental improvements, especially along transport corridors, and integrating these with better access to open space and the countryside, woodland management and wildlife corridors. At the heart is the involvement of local residents in the creation and use of green spaces, through community maintenance and adoption, promoting active leisure and events and celebrations
- expanding the scope and membership of the Business Environment Association (BEA), which gives small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) access to examples of good practice, a range of practical services, and environmental management reviews enabling them to cut costs, comply with legislation and attain recognised international standards.

The project on which this study principally focused was the regeneration of the Wren’s Nest Estate in Dudley, an intensive programme of integrated activities involving several partners. GBC’s role has mainly involved community engagement and capacity-building, through environmental improvements like the Millennium Green, reorganisation of back

gardens, establishment of a tools library and the development of green community business.

### **Groundwork Dearne Valley (GDV)**

GDV was established in 1995 by the Dearne Valley Partnership to help tackle the area's environmental and economic regeneration needs, and to engage local communities in the long-term care of their neighbourhoods. The Trust operates in Barnsley, Doncaster and part of Rotherham, in one of the most economically and socially deprived areas of the country. It employs about 24 staff and 24 apprentices on ILM projects.

The Trust's income increased from about £1m in 1998/99 to almost £1.3m in 1999/2000, raised from a range of sources including the local authorities, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), SRB, European initiatives including Resider and Objective 2 (now 1) funding, landfill tax and private sector support. It has developed close links with the RDA, Yorkshire Forward and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. GDV is an active member of some 13 local partnerships, including three private sector initiatives.

GDV's mission is to engage local people in the long-term improvement and care of their environment. Its aims include:

- developing focused and measured programmes of work as deemed appropriate by the Board
- attracting significant funding into the area
- becoming recognised as making a relevant contribution to solving the problems of the area

- being well organised with access to adequate resources
- being operational throughout the three constituent local authorities
- evaluating the work it has done in its area of operation.

The case study project was the Stewardship Model by which local residents are actively involved in the maintenance of improvements within their villages in conjunction with Village Caretakers.

### **Groundwork East Lancashire (GEL)**

GEL was established in 1994 and operates in the boroughs of Pendle, Burnley and Hyndburn, all rated in the 88 most deprived areas in the country. It employs 25 staff. The BEA operates in East Lancashire and is delivered on GEL's behalf by Groundwork Blackburn.

GEL's income in 2000/01 increased to £1.1m, from sources that included SRB, European initiatives, the National Lottery Charities Board, landfill tax, the Millennium Commission, local authorities and private sector support.

GEL's mission is 'to bring about sustainable improvements, through partnerships, to the local environment and to contribute to economic and social regeneration'. To achieve this it is seeking to develop and expand by:

- developing an East Lancashire wide network of 'Youth Works' programmes, to involve the hardest hit communities in reducing crime, improving their environment and creating better life opportunities

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- working in partnership with local communities, local authorities and Burnley Market to develop community based recycling and composting schemes
- developing a Neighbourhood Environmental Action Plans programme, working with the most deprived communities to identify and tackle needs and concerns
- developing the ELWOOD urban forestry initiative as a contribution to the rebranding of East Lancashire as a quality place to live, work and play, as part of a Regional Park initiative
- community economic development to encourage small community based enterprises
- developing Green Business parks
- developing ILMs, linked to youth exclusion issues.

Burnley Wood, the case study project, began as a 'Planning for Real' © exercise in 1997, and is one of a series of community development projects managed by GEL throughout East Lancashire.

### **Groundwork Macclesfield and Vale Royal (GMVR)**

GMVR was established in 1983 as one of five second-round Trusts. It is also active elsewhere in Cheshire (notably Crewe) through a separate subsidiary services company. The Trust remains a small one, with a staff of 12.

With programme expenditure of £1.1m in 1999/2000, GMVR has expanded its activities

considerably in recent years. Income has come from its constituent local authorities, DETR, SRB, the Millennium Commission, landfill tax, and local private sector businesses such as ICI Ltd and Astra Zeneca.

GMVR's main strategic aims for the next five years are:

- to identify programmes of work that will make a real difference to the physical environment and quality of life, for example as the lead Trust for Groundwork's national WasteSavers programme, a means of developing increased environmental awareness among schoolchildren
- to extend operations into Crewe and Nantwich and other areas of Cheshire
- to provide opportunities for all sections of the community to participate in activities to reduce unsustainable patterns of production and consumption via countryside access, cycle routes and facilities, land reclamation for recreation and environmental improvement
- to develop services in line with both the expectations of the Groundwork network and local needs and opportunities, including a bespoke service to help businesses make cost savings from environmental management activities
- to consolidate the Community Programme focus on small pockets of disadvantage and deprivation
- to secure a higher profile and increased recognition of GMVR's approach and skills.

The case study projects were two community-based estate regeneration programmes in Macclesfield District (Moss Rose in Macclesfield and Colshaw Farm in Wilmslow), and the Griffiths parkland reclamation scheme in Rudheath, Northwich (in Vale Royal District).

### Groundwork Medway Swale (GMS)

GMS covers the Medway unitary authority area and Swale district, and is now also active in Thanet through a separate subsidiary services company set up in November 1999. The Trust is in its sixth year of operation and has a staff of 24, a level which is expected to rise to match its planned growth rate.

With a 2000–01 programme valued at £1.6m, GMS has been able to lever in funding, not only from its constituent local authorities and DETR, but from various rounds of SRB, Interreg II, the Millennium Commission’s sustainable transport charity (Sustrans), and the private sector including BT, Whitbread, and Aylesford Newsprint (landfill tax).

In consultation with its partners, GMS has developed strategic aims for the next five years with a vision to become the ‘natural partner for environmental improvements in Medway Swale area’, specifically:

- developing its work to improve housing areas and green spaces in partnership with local people in a way that maximises opportunities for physical, social and economic regeneration
- making a substantial contribution to environmental education, particularly with young people, to enable them to live in a more sustainable future

- providing those affected by social exclusion with training that will address skills shortages in the area (e.g. through ILMs)
- contributing to economic regeneration (e.g. through transforming Gillingham Pier)
- regenerating derelict, contaminated and under-used land, both as a public amenity and for economic use
- providing Groundwork services where needed in nearby districts in Kent.

The case study project was the Luton Millennium Green, Rochester, the largest such Countryside Agency project in the South East. A multi-use green space was created on a derelict site that had been earmarked for housing development, in an area needing play facilities.

### Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taff (GMRCT)

GMRCT began as Merthyr Greenspace in 1985 and grew to serve the unitary authority areas of Merthyr Tydfil and Cynon Taff in 1996. The Trust has a staff of 28, including a number of Millennium and other volunteers.

The 1999–2000 programme totalled around £2m (with over £3m budgeted for 2000–01), with funding from the National Assembly for Wales, the Millennium Commission, Welsh Development Agency, the local authorities, ERDF and RECHAR, and DETR via the Coal Authority.

The Trust will be focusing its efforts on the Objective 1 planning process, to secure its local delivery role and to facilitate local groups’

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participation. Development in other spheres includes:

- securing resources to expand the Greencare Sustainable Network
- creating a new landscape with the support of the proposed UK Land Regeneration Trust
- developing the Green Business Park model and facilitating community enterprises in tourism, arts and the environment
- establishing new partnership projects in the Rhondda Cynon Taff to support prosperity in the Rhondda and the environment in Taff Ely
- new tourism projects in Taff Bargoed and Merthyr Tydfil
- National Assembly for Wales – establishing a partnership through Communities First supported by Groundwork Wales.

The main case study projects were the Gurnos and Galon Uchaf Regeneration Strategy in Merthyr, where Groundwork has been active since 1992, and the associated Fernhill Community Strategy, which began with community environmental works in 1993.

### Groundwork Merton (GM)

GM is active in the London Borough of Merton, mainly the more deprived south and east of the borough. It is a relatively new Trust, set up in 1995 and is now in its final year of development funding, with a full-time staff of 14.

Total 1999–2000 turnover exceeded £900,000, with support from the local authority, DETR, the Groundwork pan London SRB and landfill tax.

The Trust has developed a vision that ‘in ten years’ time, GM will be known throughout south-west London for bringing a new and sustainable quality to the townscape and the green spaces and helping to make the inhabitants proud to live or work here’. Over the next five years, GM aims to continue its high quality programmes, meeting local aspirations in relation to:

- urban parks
- housing estate regeneration
- small-scale, community-led environmental projects/‘placemakers’
- urban villages
- business and industry – improvements to industrial areas and promoting environment-friendly practices.

It also plans to:

- establish long-term sources of funding to support its environmental programmes
- expand its area of operation to play a wider role in south-west London
- establish a sound and profitable operational base which will be a model of excellence locally and nationally
- acquire independent and permanent premises – both for use and investment – and preferably in a location accessible to current programmes of activity

- take up trading and consultancy opportunities in support of its charitable aims.

The case study project was Making Space for Youth, which addresses problems of alienation among young people in the main deprived housing estates of the borough. It focuses on young people's relationship with their environment – physical, social, perceptual and political – to help them overcome feelings of being disenfranchised, and to develop opportunities for them to thrive.

### **Groundwork Northern Ireland (GNI)**

GNI, currently based in north Belfast, covers the whole of Northern Ireland, so far concentrating its work in Belfast, Newtownabbey, Derry, Ballymena and Lisburn District Council areas. It has recently developed a cross-border focus, engaging the border counties in projects. The Trust is in its tenth year of operation, with a staff of 20 and an annual turnover of around £427,000, although both are set to rise with recently approved New Opportunities Fund (NOF) support worth £5.5m.

Since 1996 GNI has not been able to receive core funding from DETR, although there have been small sums via Groundwork UK and this year £40,000 from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Despite vigorous lobbying the DETR's equivalent in Northern Ireland, the Department of Social Development, has not so

far taken on funding. Other funding partners include the Community Relations Council, First Trust Bank, Children in Need, Northern Ireland Electricity, Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, Belfast Regeneration Office, Belfast City Council, Marks & Spencer, Sainsburys and UK Waste Management.

GNI's vision is 'to inspire co-operation and partnership to improve the quality of people's lives through sustainable environmental regeneration in Northern Ireland'. The Trust is positioning itself into a niche: environmental regeneration linked to the cross-community agenda. Key programmes concentrate on four areas:

- environmental regeneration
- community relations
- community safety
- developing key skills within communities.

The main case study project was the Greencare initiative, targeting four estates (two loyalist and two republican) in deprived areas of Belfast. It is described as Local Agenda 21 in action, empowering local residents to be part of the decision-making process for their communities and bringing the four communities together. A community resource pack has been developed, as well as a video summing up GNI's approach: *Changing Places, Changing Lives, Changing Minds*.

# 3 Groundwork: its role in neighbourhood renewal

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## Introduction

For many of our interviewees, Groundwork is *essentially* defined by its capacity to operate on the ground, working directly with local communities – a major strength, providing the credibility on which its wider influence depends. One senior official interviewed for the study said that Groundwork’s ability to produce exemplars of what works locally is valued by ministers, and is crucial to its ability to make its voice heard nationally. In this chapter we assess Groundwork’s role in ‘neighbourhood renewal’.

## The policy context

In a recent Groundwork discussion paper, Ian Christie and Ken Worpole identify three areas of policy where the Labour Government elected in 1997 proved more radical than is often recognised:

- 1 Tackling social exclusion, where the analysis leading to the national strategy was both extensive and inclusive.
- 2 Developing a strategy for sustainable development, recognising the need for social integration and environmental protection alongside economic growth.
- 3 Modernising policy-making and governance, recognising that three problems hamper government’s ability to implement policy effectively:
  - the decline of quality standards in public services, through under-investment, staff demoralisation, and a

failure to keep up with changing patterns of need and demand

- decline in trust in government, particularly where social and economic exclusion has disconnected communities from the rest of society
- the compartmentalisation of policy-making and delivery in the face of overwhelming evidence about the joined-up character of the problems faced by deprived neighbourhoods.

Trusts have always been involved in the first, are increasingly involved in the second, but the paper argues that government’s greatest problems lie in the third area. We therefore examine Groundwork’s activities in local neighbourhoods under three headings:

- delivering locally
- engaging and empowering local communities
- joining it up locally.

## Delivering locally

### Getting started

The processes by which Groundwork gets involved in local authority districts inevitably vary. The criteria which drive the selection of new areas (at least in England) are governed in part by the terms of Groundwork’s funding agreement with DETR. But as one interviewee put it, the receptiveness of the local authority is critical.



### Criteria for evaluating proposals for new Trusts

- They would further the government's regeneration aims based on the creation of local public and private partnerships, local identity and accountability.
- There is a demonstrable need for regeneration initiatives ... which is not being met in the activities of existing organisations.
- Opportunities for attracting sufficient private resources for environmental regeneration are required in order to progressively reduce the level of support the Trust receives from central government; there must be value for money in the use of public funds.
- The level of grant support provided by the DETR is expected to decline over the life of the Trust.

The criteria and processes by which priority neighbourhoods are identified also vary, normally depending on negotiations with the council. In many cases, Trusts appear to seek the most difficult terrain in which to operate. This contrasts with the criteria that often inform local authorities' approach to neighbourhood prioritisation, where capacity and opportunity often sit alongside need. We found no shortage of examples of Groundwork operating where other agencies either refused to go or had tried to engage the community and failed. This helps explain the support which Trusts receive from their local communities, who often feel that they

have been left behind or not properly listened to. However, focusing on the neediest areas demands a commitment for the long haul and complicates the task of testing for sustainability.

The wide variations in the economic and social context within which Trusts operate, help explain the differences in the priorities they adopt. Generally, and certainly where they have been operating for any length of time, Trusts seek to engage local communities in determining priorities for action. But there were also cases where, initially at least, priorities were dictated by other factors, including the availability of funding, or the skills and experience of the Groundwork team. This can mean that consultation about the finer points of implementation is fuller than on the broad direction of priorities.

The initial focus of activity is often less important than the process of establishing a presence in a neighbourhood, and winning the trust and confidence of those who live there. In many cases, Groundwork's initial actions were environmental – landscaping estates or creating community gardens, for example. While these actions are important, staff often see them as a route to broader community development activities. For example, on the Phipps Bridge estate in Merton, Groundwork's role initially was limited to environmental improvements, but the success and visibility of the landscaping was, in the eyes of the Trust's youth worker, a precondition for the success of the community and youth development work that followed. Groundwork East Lancashire adopted a similar approach in Burnley Wood, using a series of relatively low key 'environmental' and 'planning' activities to gain the confidence of a disenchanted local community. Using

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environmental improvements as a kind of Trojan horse in this way is a distinctive feature of Groundwork's way of working, and one that brings significant advantages:

- Improvements are visible and tangible.
- It is relatively easy to engage communities in consultation about the environment.
- There are often opportunities to secure 'quick wins', which are important in persuading disillusioned residents that change is possible.

### **The Jack Turner Memorial Green, Wren's Nest Estate, Dudley**

Together with the Wren's Nest Tenants' Association and the then Countryside Commission, Groundwork Black Country helped convert a derelict site into a small park (the Jack Turner Memorial Millennium Green), mainly funded by the Millennium Commission, with support from English Partnerships. To be eligible for the former, an independent charitable trust organisation had to be established. GBC sorted out the necessary procedures and requirements. The green has now been completed and handed over to the local Trust. A resident and Trust committee member has agreed to take on day-to-day responsibility for supervision of the green. The improvement of a prominent site and the involvement of local residents have helped to boost community confidence and capacity.

There are also examples where Groundwork has led a more systematic process of strategy development, working with residents and local agencies to determine broader priorities. However, this rarely happens at an early stage in Groundwork's involvement in a neighbourhood. A lengthy period of capacity building is often required before local communities can engage in comprehensive estate or neighbourhood strategy development. For example, on the 3Gs estate in Merthyr Tydfil, Groundwork had been working for some three years before a comprehensive regeneration strategy was developed.

### **Developing a strategy for 3Gs**

A series of community based initiatives developed on the Old Gurnos, New Gurnos and Galon Uchaf estates (collectively known as the '3Gs') during the late 1980s illustrates the estates' decline. The urgent need for refurbishment led to its designation as a Priority Estate Project in 1986, and local concerns about crime and vandalism led to the establishment of a resident-led Neighbourhood Watch. An increasing range of organisations started work on the estates in the early 1990s, but in isolation and with no sense of shared strategy. Groundwork became involved in the early 1990s, initially with standard environmental programmes, the construction of garden walls and so on. But it was only in 1994 that, under Groundwork's leadership, a comprehensive strategy for the estates was developed, drawing on ERDF Objective 2 funds (which Groundwork was instrumental in securing).

### What kinds of actions?

To provide some idea of the diversity of Groundwork's activity, Groundwork's own categorisation of actions undertaken locally is summarised below. In practice there is a high degree of interaction between different categories.

#### 1 *People*

- Programmes for young people.
- Developing community capacity.
- Working in schools.
- Building local organisations.
- Promoting healthy lifestyles.

#### 2 *Places*

- Reclaiming derelict land.
- Landscaping estates.
- Creating community gardens.
- Improving industrial and commercial estates.

#### 3 *Prosperity*

- Providing training.
- Creating employment opportunities through Intermediate Labour Market mechanisms.
- Advising businesses on environmental risk and cost reduction (through energy efficiency schemes, for example).

However the key to the local impact of Groundwork projects lies in their capacity to stretch simple project ideas to address a variety of objectives simultaneously – graphically illustrated by the project to remove a notorious loyalist paramilitary mural from an estate wall in North Belfast.

### Removing a mural – and exploring local identity

The entrance to the Mount Vernon estate in North Belfast was decorated with a loyalist paramilitary mural, with the slogan 'Prepared for Peace – Ready for War'. Young residents were brought together to decide what would take its place – the process and the end product gave the young people and their families a focus for discussion about the non-violent aspects of their history. The mural has been replaced with images illustrating the area's traditions, including the construction of the *Titanic*, on which many of the children's grandfathers worked. The new mural has survived without interference from paramilitary organisations.

### Developing and managing projects

Our evidence suggests that Groundwork is seen as an organisation that 'gets things done', a reputation underpinning relationships with local communities, since it is seen as contrasting with the capacity of statutory agencies. For example, there are parts of the 3Gs and Fernhill estates in Merthyr Tydfil that are regarded as 'no-go' areas by local agency staff, though local Groundwork staff report no problems operating there, provided they are wearing Groundwork sweatshirts, and leave Groundwork stickers on their cars. In Groundwork Northern Ireland one member of staff comes from the south of the

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Republic, but has been accepted on loyalist estates because she works with Groundwork. Groundwork is trusted because it is seen as a neutral player. This is also recognised by officers in statutory agencies, who admit to using Groundwork to get things done in ways they would find difficult through their own organisations.

Neighbourhood programmes devised by Trusts tend to be characterised by flexibility and persistence. One local politician saw this as a 'cultural' issue in that local Trusts appear less constrained by bureaucracy, hierarchies, and committee structures than local government. This flexibility was often seen to accompany Groundwork's reputation as a 'fixer'. Typically this revolves around an ability to access funding streams; effective, 'end-product' orientated relationships with other regeneration agencies; a willingness to lobby local (and central) politicians; and an overriding determination to bring 'everyone on board'.

Groundwork's flexibility and lack of bureaucracy can include the absence of detailed systems relating to project development, appraisal, or approval. In some of the case study Trusts, the only 'approval' procedure rests with the Executive Director. In one case, local partners expressed frustration at the 'cumbersome' nature of Groundwork procedures, arising out of a system which meant that staff were unable to take decisions without referring issues back.

Groundwork Medway Swale has developed relatively systematic internal procedures covering pre-entry, entry, mid-term review and exit, to deal with the various stages in the

Trust's relationship with local communities. These all turn on the production of project documentation that enables project progress to be tracked and monitored. But this degree of rigour appears relatively uncommon. Certainly, we were generally unable to secure detailed baseline information about the circumstances of target estates or neighbourhoods that would allow for the systematic evaluation of project impacts. This is an issue to which we return in our conclusions, but two issues need to be flagged up here:

- Staff tend to feel that what they do is 'good practice', a view echoed by most partners and local residents; but can this success be measured?
- Have the lessons emerging from neighbourhood activities been disseminated as they should to both internal and external audiences?

The scale of financial resources available to each case study Trust varies significantly, although even for key projects these are relatively modest. For example, the Merton youth project, regarded as a national model of good practice, manages on funding of less than £120k a year. But Groundwork has acquired a reputation as an effective and creative fundraiser. Groundwork Merton helped the local authority youth service identify and secure funds to establish summer schemes. In Northern Ireland Groundwork was the driving force in the preparation of the successful bid to the New Opportunities Fund. Groundwork Dearne Valley has secured a range of funding,

including various European streams, SRB, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, the RDA, and in Macclesfield Groundwork was instrumental in securing SRB funding for the Moss Rose estate where the local authority had previously tried and failed.

In most of the Trusts we visited, there is an emphasis on acting as a catalyst, developing local capacity rather than creating a dependence on Groundwork. Some specific dimensions to this include:

- involving local people in all stages of project development
- planning early on to transfer responsibility for projects to local organisations
- building and developing local organisations as part of a succession strategy
- helping identify funding streams to enable local projects to continue in the longer term.

But there are tensions about whether staff can in practice exit from the projects they start, and indeed whether the ability to remain in an area long term actually represents good practice. Soon after Groundwork Merton started work on the Lavender estate, one of the local children asked 'Are you going to be here and gone like the last lot?' We found few examples of Groundwork leaving an area where it had been working. Its *role* may have changed over time, from one of direct project management to more remote hand-holder. But generally there remained the comfort of a Groundwork presence, and local people knew that

Groundwork was always on hand, as with the Stewardship groups established in the Dearne, and the Environment Steering Group in Wren's Nest Estate in Dudley. One Executive Director described project 'clustering' as a key component to sustainability – creating a critical mass of projects in an area, and developing a series of activities with the same group. Groundwork Medway Swale has adopted a formal 'exit strategy' procedure to shape its dealings with community groups.

### **Groundwork Medway Swale exit strategy**

In order for GMS to exit effectively, the community group should have discussed and agreed:

- an overview of the project – past initiatives and future potential
- the aims and objectives of the group and a mission statement
- the committee / meeting structure – regularity, location, roles, filing, finance
- a work programme to include detailed 12-month proposals, a five-year plan and information on GMS future commitment, aftercare arrangements
- fundraising – possible options
- training – possible options where the group can get information from
- contacts list – group contacts, agencies, networks, etc., and data protection implications
- monitoring and evaluation – to include evaluations of past activities and agreed methods and timetable for evaluating future projects.

### Engaging and empowering local communities

Involving local communities in neighbourhood renewal has been emphasised in government policy for many years. This imperative recognises:

- 1 The powerful role communities can play in highlighting local needs and gauging local opinion.
- 2 The opportunities (often not fully exploited) of using regeneration interventions as sources of paid work for local people around tasks such as household and business surveys.
- 3 The contribution community involvement can make to 'sustainability' through:
  - reducing vandalism and providing local resources through which to ensure longer-term project maintenance
  - enhancing the capacity of local actors
  - improving employability of local people, and their competitiveness in pursuing local job opportunities
  - bestowing the legitimacy that accompanies a local sense of ownership.

The process of securing real community involvement is not without difficulty. For instance:

- There can be a tendency to conflate the 'community' with local residents; other groupings like local businesses may not receive the attention they deserve.

- There can be an assumption that local communities are homogeneous entities with a single voice.
- Those claiming to be 'community leaders' are not necessarily regarded as such by their constituencies.
- Developing a 'community dimension' involves long-term commitment from a wide range of mainstream agencies, not all of which are necessarily committed to 'community based regeneration'.
- It is easy to exaggerate the scale of community based resources; capacity may be limited to a few over-committed individuals, hard to replace if they withdraw through ill health, or 'burn out'.
- There is uncertainty about the relationship between community based regeneration and the wider policy agenda: how will local community voices be heard in LSPs?

### Groundwork and community involvement

It is clear from this study that the determination of Groundwork staff to involve local communities is driven by three broad impulses.

First, as one member of Groundwork East Lancashire suggested, reflecting on the Trust's experience of intensive locality based work, neighbourhood programmes are 'simply ideal'. They allow for a concentration of effort in small defined areas of deprivation, they encourage local partnership working, they help the Trust and other partners build up local capacity, and

they stimulate the implementation of immediate, environmentally desirable changes. As one local authority officer acknowledged, 'Groundwork reaches places we can't reach'.

Second, many neighbourhoods examined during this study are either amongst the most deprived localities nationally or represent particularly depressed localities in generally affluent areas. The relative lack of social or institutional capital can be a striking feature of such environments, as MacLennan identified in his critique of the neighbourhood renewal strategy consultation draft (MacLennan, 2000). The case study localities are characterised by substantial economic change, involving a loss of manufacturing jobs and a parallel increase in service sector employment. Unfortunately increases in the latter do not always balance out losses in the former. Ex-coal-mining villages in areas like South Wales and the Dearne Valley show how severely damaging these processes can be. The economic rationale for the community disappears; severe job losses occur, especially amongst men; and there is little for the wider community to fall back on. Such communities have few immediately realisable indigenous skills. According to one Groundwork worker, the Trust had 'almost a duty' to help re-establish capacity within the local community.

Third, there is a recognition amongst Groundwork staff that many residents in such localities consider themselves to have been, in a phrase which cropped up frequently, 'forgotten by the council'. Whether or not the council was actually responsible for the apparent lack of services and support, Groundwork is perceived to have provided much needed local initiative and resources. The study suggests that local

Trusts are prepared to move into neglected communities, acting often initially as a 'sole player'. According to one community representative in Burnley Wood, 'nothing happened here for 20 years' until Groundwork 'came on board'. In Belfast the estates which became the focus for Greencare initiatives felt largely abandoned and 'left behind by the peace process'. The precise nature of their problems varied – a proliferation of republican community and voluntary groups with serious overcrowding on the one hand and an underdeveloped community infrastructure and depopulation on the other. But they also share common problems – poverty, high male unemployment, distrust of public sector agencies, low confidence and self-esteem. Asked to do something to help residents, Groundwork moved into a vacuum, occupying territory that almost all other professionals had abandoned.

Groundwork's approach towards community involvement in relation to neighbourhood regeneration is underpinned by a number of key principles:

- 1 *Involving local people in the identification and analysis of issues.* Across all the case studies, Trusts have developed exercises to tease out views within and across neighbourhoods, through activities such as Fun Days, Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> exercises, Newsletters, or ensuring a presence at local galas or fairs. Specific examples include:
  - The Luton Millennium Green project in Rochester used a local theatre group to stimulate interest (particularly among young people) in what was being developed.

- On estates in Merton young people undertook video surveys to secure residents' views about priorities.
  - A community audit by local people on Belfast's Old Warren estate produced a picture of the neighbourhood and residents' priorities.
  - In Burnley Wood a local video was produced to help instil stronger interest in local environmental projects and to feed back to the wider community local views about priorities for change.
  - In Wren's Nest in Dudley a Community Visioning conference was facilitated by Groundwork Black Country and Dudley MBC Housing Services; the conclusions formed the basis for a successful bid to the SRB.
- 2 *Using simple language.* There was frequent praise for the informal and accessible language used by Groundwork staff: as one councillor commented, 'it sent out the right signals from the start ... development needs workers from the area ... not different accents'.
- 3 *Willingness to listen.* Residents and others comment on the degree to which Groundwork staff *listen*, a view widespread across the Trusts examined in this study.

### **Sustaining community involvement**

Of course stimulating community involvement is one thing, sustaining it another. In some respects Trusts' approaches to community involvement do not differ markedly from those

adopted by other bodies. Groundwork's distinctive feature is its greater commitment to continuity in relation to community involvement. There is a real sense of persistence in what Trusts are doing.

This emphasis on sustaining community involvement is increasingly appropriate. Policy guidance on area based regeneration initiatives stresses the need to embrace and involve local communities, but this assumes that communities have the capacity to provide sensible and continuing inputs into the regeneration process. One recent review of community involvement in SRB schemes concludes that community representatives are often 'worried about their own lack of capacity and resources to participate in the way that the current government desires' (Foley and Martin, 2000). Communities typically lack capacity in relation to devising and delivering programmes, partnership working, business planning and what Robson has called the other 'paraphernalia of contemporary successful economic urban policy' (Robson, 1998).

In recent years a number of studies have tried to tease out those factors which might help sustain community involvement in area based regeneration. Long has identified the key elements in sustainability from a social housing perspective (Long, 2000). In their study for DETR, Evans and Fordham described how creating new focuses of concern helped keep residents involved after the main processes of estate renewal are complete (Evans and Fordham, 2000). These perspectives on sustainability provide a useful context within which to locate efforts undertaken by Trusts to develop community capacity building.



One important ingredient of Trusts' local activities is the determination to work with all groups and across different constituencies. Two groups traditionally excluded from regeneration programmes are young people and the local business community.

In all the case studies, there is an emphasis on the role younger people can play in sustaining community involvement. Trusts routinely work with local schools, often around specific environmental projects. But there is no assumption that school based work draws out the views of all young people. In Burnley Wood the Trust concentrated on establishing what local children wanted, and as one parent said, 'they wanted a BMX track and that's exactly what they got'. The redesign of the playground area at Moss Rose primary school in Macclesfield was based on the perceptive ideas emerging from the children's full participation in the exercise, some of which tied into schoolwork. The result has proved to be popular with children, teachers and parents alike. The Gillingham Education Action Zone leader praised the impact of Groundwork's schools projects not only on pupils and staff involved and the school playgrounds, but also on pupils' families and on the schools' neighbours.

Many Trusts have recognised the need to go beyond the school gates to secure all children's views. In Merton, Groundwork helped establish a youth centre on a local estate, but was also concerned to reach young people for whom even an informal youth centre was too close to 'officialdom'. The Trust has developed an outreach programme engaging with young people where they are, rather than assuming they will come to a centre.

The case studies also showed how Trusts have sought to elicit the views of the local business community. This is not always easy, especially where the local business community has itself been subject to contraction and recession. In neglected estates like Wren's Nest in Dudley, there has never been much private sector presence beyond a few local shops.

A number of Trusts have developed their capacity to offer environmental business services. Groundwork Wales now co-ordinates this activity for its Welsh Trusts, and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) has indicated that it 'greatly values the contribution made by Groundwork's Brightsite programme to improving the environment of industrial areas in South Wales and enhancing opportunities for economic development'. Support programmes include site and industrial estate landscape improvements, assistance with environmental audits, and securing compliance with environmental management system accreditation.

In Northern Ireland the importance of working closely (and transparently) with all sections of the community has a unique dimension. For Groundwork Northern Ireland, success and sustainability are closely identified with the peace process and with the establishment of Creating Common Ground, whose vision is:

*To inspire co-operation and partnership, to work to develop a living environment which includes all traditions and which celebrates diversity. This creates sustainable improvements.*

As many Trusts have experienced, community consultation rarely leads to

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consensus. This dilemma can be especially acute for an ostensibly 'environmental' organisation such as Groundwork. On the one hand, neighbourhood audits often show a high priority for programmes designed to ameliorate environmental problems: litter, appearance, image and so on. Ken Worpole has referred to this as 'renewing the public realm' (Worpole, 2000). But because of the immediacy of physically based improvements, they can also accentuate local conflicts. These may revolve around the contrasting needs of children and older residents, different attitudes towards access to open space, alternative views of landscaping, and so on.

Trusts address these tensions in different ways. Some adopt techniques like Planning for Real<sup>®</sup> exercises to tease out contrasting perspectives on strategies and projects. There is a willingness too to 'work things through' as one resident said. This may be possible through debate and negotiation. However Trusts can also be directive in their approach: changes need to be implemented, and not all constituencies will receive exactly what they want. The capacity of Trusts to raise funds offers an invaluable weapon here. To one councillor reflecting on conflict resolution, it appeared that the local Trust is very good at 'getting its hands on the loot', which inevitably puts them in pole position to drive forward change.

Sustainable approaches towards area based regeneration require enhanced capacity within the community itself. Questions surrounding 'capacity' and 'social capital' are figuring increasingly in wider debates on area based change. Taylor has recently summed up much of this thinking by arguing that effective

community based regeneration 'requires an investment in community development, which supports local people in developing their own activities, in developing networks and alliances with each other and with authorities, and in learning how to tackle the issues which affect them' (Taylor, 2000).

Trusts have responded in various ways to capacity building: involving communities in projects, establishing community infrastructure, pooling resources, building on successes and so on. Much of this work often mirrors what other agencies attempt to do. There are however examples where Trusts have proved genuinely innovative in relation to the local 'institutional architecture'. The need for innovation reflects the issues that neighbourhood renewal inevitably raises about the willingness and ability of local residents to participate in, and to sustain, community based institutions. Evidence points, as one observer said, to a 'frightening' commitment on a small number of active local residents, which is hard to sustain over time, particularly if it entails an endless round of meetings and paperwork. This is certainly the case on Wren's Nest in Dudley and in the Griffiths Park development in Northwich. In contrast, in both places there is greater willingness to participate in concrete events and activities, where people feel they are contributing something of substance.

The Stewardship Model developed in the Dearne Valley represents one successful approach towards the problem of sustaining community involvement, whilst drawing other agencies into longer-term commitments towards the area.

### **The Stewardship Model; Groundwork Dearne Valley**

The model has been developed to help ensure the longer-term maintenance of environmental improvements in ex-coal-mining villages like Bolton-on-Dearne. Maintenance plans are initially developed through community based steering groups. These may involve keyholder arrangements whereby groups of local residents agree to open and lock improved facilities. Planning and maintenance are usually carried out by a village caretaker with a remit to maintain physical improvements under supervision from the Stewardship group. Village caretakers are likely to have undertaken previous Groundwork organised ILM training and are also provided with more general supervisory assistance from the Trust. Support has been secured through SRB and other resources. Critically Stewardship groups seek to develop legal agreements with the local authority concerned. Barnsley has proved especially interested in developing such agreements. These cover obligations by both parties, liability insurance, funding, review and so on. The advantages are that the commitments of different parties are made explicit, added value is provided by local volunteers, local ownership is encouraged, competition between different providers is reduced, and there is a longer-term integration of environmental, social and economic goals. These agreements have a role in encouraging and guiding the longer-term sustainability of community based regeneration.

Capacity building is about encouraging collective skills and responses. But equally it can be premised on individual success stories. Trusts are well placed to promote these by virtue of their longevity, flexibility, and access to a range of potential 'rewards'. For instance, there are some real success stories emerging from residents involved in the Burnley Wood programme in East Lancashire.

People made redundant from manufacturing were 'taken on' by the local Trust. They were paid for initial local survey work; some then moved on to chair meetings, organise residents, report problems; in turn some received Groundwork Millennium awards and were trained to NVQ3 level in ecological or landscaping skills, or in Youth and Community work. Some have used their community development and capacity building skills to obtain new employment in youth work. This willingness to take on the needs and aspirations of individuals helps to build up local expertise; it can assist in reducing poverty and, as one local worker pointed out, it provided a wider resource base from which ultimately 'someone else can fill in the forms'.

### **Joining it up locally**

A consistent theme in these case studies is the extent to which local Trusts impart dynamism to regeneration through programmes which synthesise across policy agendas. Social exclusion needs to be attacked through co-ordinated programmes addressing the diverse but interrelated dimensions of deprivation including health, education, crime and jobs. But in practice it is not always easy to achieve this, because of the complexities of funding

arrangements, inter-agency tensions, and the continuing 'silo' mentality evident in many public agencies.

Trusts have proved to be prime movers in helping to create a holistic approach to neighbourhood regeneration. This may involve, for instance, focusing activity on a community centre or similar physical entity in order to help create a 'bright light' in the locality. But perhaps more importantly, attempts at integration are often rooted in activity across different policy agendas. Details vary from area to area. Typically however local strategies may incorporate educational initiatives in conjunction with local schools, local environmental improvements designed in co-operation with local businesses, job creation programmes through ILMs, and local environmental schemes to help reduce crime and vandalism. As one independent observer suggests, 'environmental regeneration and social regeneration go hand in hand, and can be promoted and developed as a joint project' (Worpole, 2000, p. 15). One example of this has occurred in Burnley Wood where Groundwork East Lancashire has played a critical role in the creation of a 'one-stop shop'.

### Conclusions

In this section we have described the activities of some of our case study Trusts within local neighbourhoods, to give a flavour both of *what* they do and the *processes* by which they carry out these actions. But is it possible to assess the impact and effectiveness of Groundwork's interventions? There are constraints on our ability to measure the impact of Groundwork interventions with any rigour:

### 'One-stop shop': Groundwork East Lancashire

An old church has been converted into a central focal point housing a range of local services and initiatives. These include training facilities in computing, English and maths, basic education courses, and a number of existing or planned social or economic initiatives including Youth Works, a credit union, local community workers and an area caretaker. This is a classic example of how Groundwork's commitment to partnership working can both reflect local needs and also help reap substantial benefits. In particular the one-stop shop was identified as a major priority by the local community during an extensive programme of public consultation; GEL was able to access capital funds including SRB and Objective 2 resources; other partners were 'drawn into' the notion of a physical base in which to house local services; the commitment to the running of the centre through local trustees helps to build capacity in the community; and there is a strong sense that the initiative is going somewhere.

What makes this approach to 'focal points' unusual is the way that the Trust has also embedded within it a number of 'environmental' initiatives and projects, notably 'Earthlings'. This involves the collection of domestic compost, and its use in a local permaculture centre and community garden, the produce from which it is anticipated will be used in a local community cafe. By being a regular presence on the streets, those collecting compost can also assist in the drive against local crime and feed back 'local voices' into the initiative as a whole. As one local councillor comments 'Groundwork has involved everybody ... when we felt neglected'.

- the inherent difficulties of attributing causal relationships between changes in a neighbourhood and particular interventions, especially when they sit alongside a variety of other players' initiatives
- resistance among Trusts to the provision of baselines against which to measure change
- the comparatively limited scale of Groundwork interventions in relation to the issues faced in the areas where they operate
- Trusts' lack of control over key issues affecting impacts – for example, housing allocations policies.

For these and other reasons, the consequences of the interventions by our case study Trusts do *not* include the sustainable transformation of the neighbourhoods where they operate. But then it is hard to think of any neighbourhoods where even the full panoply of publicly funded interventions has achieved that either. None of the Trusts we have visited is under any illusions that sustainable and deep-rooted improvements will be exceptionally difficult given the scale of available resources. So what can we say about the impacts of Groundwork interventions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods?

- 1 *Project activity.* Each Trust in the study has initiated an impressive range of project activity, typically in difficult circumstances, across a variety of policy fields. Activities are unlikely to have happened without Groundwork's involvement: as we have discussed, one of Groundwork's distinctive characteristics is its readiness to work where other agencies cannot (or will not) go, suggesting a high degree of additionality for Groundwork interventions.
- 2 *Enhancing the value of others' activities.* Groundwork rarely operates alone. Our work revealed numerous examples where Groundwork's distinctive contributions have been developed alongside other programmes.
- 3 *Creating neighbourhood partnerships.* Groundwork has been instrumental in bringing in other partners, and helping them work more effectively as a partnership.
- 4 *Strengthened community capacity.* In all of our case studies, community organisations and the capacity of the community to influence decisions that affect it were stronger as a result of Groundwork's presence.
- 5 *Finance raised for future activities.* In virtually all the exemplars explored here, Trusts proved effective at tapping into streams of funding to get things going, and in identifying potential sources of funding for future activities.
- 6 *Improved confidence and self-esteem.* In a number of cases there was greater confidence about, and pride in, neighbourhoods as a result of programmes developed by Groundwork.

### 7 *Changed behaviour by partners.*

Groundwork can influence the agencies with which it works in a way that extends well beyond the immediate neighbourhood. Some specific examples emerging from this study include:

- a local police officer describing how the police approach to consultation had improved since their involvement with Groundwork
- the adoption by a local council of a neighbourhood-based approach across the authority because of the experience of dealing with Groundwork
- recognition of the importance of 'housing plus' activities by a major social landlord in Medway.

We understand that the Groundwork movement is currently planning a major expansion, particularly into areas prioritised under the NSNR. This will offer Groundwork the chance to spread more widely aspects of good practice documented above. Limitations on resources mean that Groundwork is rarely involved in more than a handful of neighbourhoods in each local authority where it operates. However, this summary of impacts suggests that its influence can extend beyond those localities. There is, however, greater scope for Trusts to share experiences with partners, thus extending still further Groundwork's influence and mission.

One of the aims of this evaluation is to identify the extent to which Groundwork's interventions in neighbourhoods could be said to be 'sustainable' – that is, survive beyond the involvement of the Groundwork team. In principle, Groundwork's interventions are

expected to be time limited, and designed to create (among other things) the capacity for local communities to take ownership of, and responsibility for, projects. This should enable the Groundwork teams to move on to other areas.

A similar philosophy has underpinned national approaches to regeneration for at least the past 20 years: the investment of concentrated resources in a relatively small and well-defined area for a fixed or limited period (so the argument goes) should make it possible to generate processes leading to 'sustainable' regeneration thereafter. In practice there have been a number of difficulties with this approach:

- There is little consensus about the meaning of 'sustainable'. For some it has a quasi-ecological meaning ('self-sustaining'); for others, it simply means 'requiring no further special resources'.
- Little work has been undertaken to test whether the consequences of short or fixed life funding do actually survive. However, the frequency with which the same areas are selected for successive 'short-life' programmes raises doubts about the effectiveness of this approach.
- The definition of what is meant by 'short-life' has been steadily expanding over the years, from two years in the case of (some) Task Forces; for City Challenge, five; for the SRB, seven; but for the NDC programme, up to ten.

Many Trusts are sceptical whether it is feasible or desirable to contemplate exit strategies. Trusts are less determined to 'move on' than most regeneration partnerships

(influenced of course by the terms of their funding agreements). This may mean that Groundwork becomes an unusual, even unique repository of expertise in relation to longer-term neighbourhood renewal programmes. It is increasingly recognised that deprived areas need a longer-term programme of intervention than has been assumed in the past. Indeed the NSNR reverses the language of the short-term catalytic approach by conceding that to reverse the spiral of decline in our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods requires ten to 20 years of sustained investment, and not just from relatively small special funds.

Although in a number of instances there was a change of role, we found no examples where Groundwork had actually *withdrawn* from a disadvantaged neighbourhood. In some cases, the Trust had become involved with other projects in the same locality. In others, the Trust had only been involved for two or three years, and the issue of exit had yet to arrive. But elsewhere, Trust staff were clear that the whole notion of 'exit' was not appropriate to the circumstances of the communities within which they were working.

## 4 Groundwork: its role within partnerships

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### Introduction

As we have seen, Groundwork's activities at the neighbourhood level are invariably rooted in partnership – indeed its legal structure requires it. Some of its most impressive achievements have involved brokering the introduction of other agencies into neighbourhoods where they had not previously ventured. However, for most agencies the neighbourhood is not the level where key decisions are made. Hence the ability of Groundwork to affect the issues it seeks to address depends on its ability to influence these agencies, at least as much as project actions it initiates locally. The capacity of Trusts for working effectively in partnership is therefore critical to performance.

### The policy context

At least in the rhetoric, the importance of partnership working has been embedded in the culture of regeneration for many years. A few examples will make this clear:

- At the *local level*, guidance on NDC insists on partnerships with residents at the core, but with the involvement too of business, the local authority and other public bodies (DETR, 1999).
- At a more *strategic level*, government has indicated that an LSP should be 'a cross-sectoral, cross-agency, umbrella partnership ... bringing together the public, private voluntary and community sectors to provide a single overarching local co-ordination framework within which other, more specific local partnerships can operate' (DETR, 2000).

- Finally, in terms of *national policy*, the Urban White Paper indicates that an urban renaissance will require central government committing itself to a 'new long-term partnership with local communities, regional and local bodies and other key stakeholders including the private sector' (DETR, 2001).
- More fundamentally, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal* argues that the lack of leadership and effective mechanisms for joint working – in other words the absence of partnership – helps account in part for the disadvantage in our most deprived neighbourhoods: 'no one institution, at local, regional or national level, has had clear responsibility for the fate of deprived neighbourhoods' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001).

However, whatever the spatial scale at which partnerships operate, the case for partnership is compelling:

- The policy environment governing sustainable regeneration is more complex than ten or even five years ago: there are more institutions and organisations with an interest in, and powers over, aspects of social and economic regeneration.
- Partnership working has a financial imperative: regulations governing an increasing proportion of grants for local regeneration insist on delivery through partnerships.
- Partnership working can help create 'synergy': net outcome adds up to more than would have occurred had institutions worked independently.



- It can encourage cultural change through which agencies adopt more innovative and flexible approaches towards sustainable regeneration.
- It leads to a more rapid and cost-effective transfer of good practice.
- By pooling agencies and resources, it is more likely that a sustainable approach can be secured and maintained.

There is a powerful expectation that the NSNR will generate radical changes in the focus of partnership activity. Under previous regimes partnerships have seen their role as essentially to do with the supervision of special programme funds, rather than their own core budgets. The emphasis in the NSNR is on the more co-ordinated use of main programme expenditure. Local partnerships will now be expected to influence individual partners' core budgets. Groundwork's ability to influence how partners spend their main programme budgets becomes a critical test of its effectiveness in partnership working in the new policy environment.

### **Groundwork's attitude to and role in partnership working**

Groundwork staff are clearly committed to partnerships: 'it's what we're about'. There is a virtually unanimous view that partnership working is an essential ingredient in effective and sustainable regeneration programmes. However this approach is not perceived as especially new. Traditional Groundwork environmental projects have always required innovative and flexible work with a raft of local partners.

The environment can also prove an effective device through which to pursue other policy agendas: 'a peg to hang all kinds of projects'. A good example is the development of Griffiths Park in Northwich by Groundwork Macclesfield and Vale Royal, the District Council and ICI Ltd.

#### **Griffiths Park, Rudheath near Northwich, Cheshire**

A park is being developed in an area previously lacking in public open space on the site of an old lime waste pond between Rudheath and the ICI chemicals works. The result will be a 15 hectare recreational space: Griffiths Park. The project has had a considerable degree of community involvement (including local schools) in both design and development. This will continue with the formation of the Friends of Griffiths Park to contribute to the maintenance and long-term management of the scheme. An apparently straightforward environmental project has also assisted in a range of other objectives including community capacity building, engaging local schools, and forming longer-term management and maintenance structures.

In all the case studies there is a strong emphasis on including local communities within partnerships. As one of those centrally involved in Groundwork East Lancashire points out, the regeneration of Burnley Wood was firmly based on 'finding out where the real needs lie' and if 'someone else can tackle it, bring them on board'. It is accepted across

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Groundwork that Trusts 'cannot do everything'. Change can only be secured if different organisations embrace common goals, within a framework largely set by local needs and aspirations. As one resident in Burnley commented: 'we want them [other agencies] to work to our agenda – not theirs'.

### Partnership working: partners' perspectives

The character of Groundwork involvement in partnerships locally is both intensive and wide-ranging. In areas explored during this study, the scale of multi-agency involvement is often striking, particularly in more deprived neighbourhoods. Local government inevitably represents the most frequently encountered partner, largely because the projects with which Groundwork is involved call for collaboration with various local government departments including environmental services, leisure, planning, and housing. But projects may also involve collaboration by a much wider group of agencies including TECs, further education colleges, transport operators, the police, local businesses, charities, housing associations, English Partnerships, RDAs, the Benefits Agency, and of course, community and voluntary groups.

The work of Groundwork Trusts in developing and sustaining partnerships is generally perceived in a positive light. The line taken in the interim evaluation of the SRB programme in Wrens Nest in Dudley could almost be applied to any Trust:

*Groundwork is proving to be the perfect partner. Not only does it approach partnership in a comprehensively professional way, it is also*

*proving that its staff are skilled at working with community groups. It is a particular feature of the organisation's work in the area that it encourages more 'ownership' of the regeneration process than most other projects. Clearly, this part of the programme is achieving more than 'output' results; it is providing a real prospect of changes to the environment, to attitudes and to the essential feeling of 'ownership' among a broad range of residents'.*

(Marchant and Marchant, 1999)

These positive perceptions are based on a number of considerations:

- Groundwork is seen as an 'enabler' and a 'fixer', able to 'get things off the ground' more quickly and often more effectively than is possible for most other agencies, most of the time.
- This perception is often rooted in partners' experiences of Trusts being able to raise financial resources, with little apparent difficulty: 'it came along when the local authority budget was being slashed. It became another source of money'.
- Groundwork's attitude to project development: it is seen as having a much higher risk-taking capacity than other organisations, and is 'prepared to accept that some things flop'.
- Groundwork is not overly committed to the 'logo culture': 'they get their names on things, but make sure everyone else's is too'.
- Perhaps the biggest single factor in this positive perception is the way in which

local Trusts relate to local communities: to one senior local government officer it was quite clear that in terms of community involvement, 'Groundwork does what we should be doing'.

There are numerous examples in the case study Trusts of the specific impact of Groundwork's role on partnership building and the consequences that flow from it. In Merthyr Tydfil, Groundwork activity helped change the local authority's approach to partnership working across the whole town. In Northern Ireland, by common consent, Groundwork was instrumental in bringing together a range of key players (including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Community Relations Council), which in turn led to a successful bid to the New Opportunities Fund for £5m.

There are some exceptions to this positive view. One independent observer with a long-standing experience of Groundwork in a number of capacities, refers to its relations with other partners as 'verging on the arrogant'. One local authority Parks Manager suggested that Groundwork has in essence 'taken over' one neighbourhood and basically kept out the authority 'except when they want something'.

Concern is also expressed by a number of observers about the extent to which Groundwork has, or might, secure tasks and kudos which really belonged to other agencies. One modernising deputy Chief Executive, in an authority with a long tradition of working with Groundwork, referred to this attitude as a form of 'defensive thinking' which continued to permeate the authority. His view was that this tended to reflect 'old Labour' traditions which

some officers and councillors continued to hold. Those adopting this view continued to regard organisations such as Groundwork as 'taking our jobs' and doing things 'which we could do anyway'. But he stressed that this was very much a minority perspective. 'If we could have done what Groundwork has done, why didn't we?'.

There is some evidence to suggest that positive perspectives on Groundwork are more likely to be adopted by senior managers in local government than is the case for middle managers or field workers. To those operating at the strategic or senior level, Groundwork appears to offer a vehicle through which to pursue a range of 'modernising' agendas surrounding Best Value and 'enabling' local government. Those with this wider remit are more likely to look favourably on Groundwork's more flexible, innovative and inclusive approach to regeneration as exemplars for their own authority. Groundwork can thus help senior managers in their efforts to pursue the 'modernising agenda'. However, those with a direct interest in the delivery of services locally may be inclined to take a somewhat less enthusiastic perspective on the role of local Trusts.

We heard varying accounts of Groundwork's ability to deal effectively as a partner with the private sector, doubtless reflecting variations in practice and performance around the country. This is also a consequence of the kinds of projects we were asked to review, which focused largely on neighbourhood renewal. There have been long-standing relationships with some large companies at national level (Marks & Spencer and Barclays, for example), and there are private sector representatives on Trust boards. But it is

not clear that all Trusts know how to make best use of private sector expertise. In some cases we detected no significant private sector involvement in the actual work of Trusts. One Trust chair (from the private sector) thought it was because of the organisation's culture and even language, which is 'impenetrable to the business community', and therefore a barrier to private sector involvement. In other places like the Black Country, involvement with private business was a central part of the Trust's business, but tended to be largely self-contained, providing tailored environmental advice or developing schemes for the improvement of industrial estates and business parks. But there are cases (Northern Ireland, for example) where private sector representatives exert real leadership over Trust operations.

### **Partnership working: the wider implications for Groundwork**

The broad conclusions of this analysis of Groundwork's role in partnership working are generally favourable. Trusts have proved effective at partnership working; they have used partnerships in a positive, instrumentalist, manner to help implement area based programmes and projects; and, with some insignificant caveats, most partners are impressed with the impact and role of local Trusts in partnership working. However, all of this raises a number of important considerations for Groundwork as an institution:

- Effective partnership working requires complex interpersonal skills, including an ability to negotiate, to link strategic and practical thinking, to synthesise across

different agendas, and to be aware of a wide range of financial, institutional and legal opportunities and constraints. Evidence from this study suggests that many local staff have, or are acquiring such skills. But there are problems. Many staff appear to view Groundwork as a training opportunity and intend to use it as a stepping stone to other things; as a result invaluable expertise is being lost to the organisation.

- Groundwork's involvement in partnership working also reflects an operational tension for the organisation: are there any benefits to be gained in prioritising partnership working within – relatively – 'empty spaces'? In most deprived areas, especially those in larger cities, there will almost invariably be a complex policy environment within which Groundwork will be only one – often relatively insignificant – player. But some of the case studies located in places such as Burnley, the South Yorkshire Coalfields and Macclesfield show that Groundwork can play a more significant – often lead – role where there are fewer 'competitors'. The organisation is generally in a better position to devise and pursue a more catholic agenda than are some other obvious lead agencies. It can help instil a more overtly environmental slant to regeneration, and it has an especially strong tradition of listening to the most 'forgotten' of constituencies.
- The reverse is also true. While Trusts find it relatively easy to establish a role for

themselves as lead players in 'uncrowded' areas, it is self-evidently more difficult where there are large numbers of players and extensive regeneration activities and experience. This raises questions about the circumstances where Groundwork can expect to be offered a seat on the LSP – without which it may become difficult for Groundwork to exert sustained and substantial influence on other players. But experience differs across the organisation. Groundwork Manchester has been selective about the areas within which it operates. By 'layering' its activities the Trust brings to bear within relatively small areas a raft of initiatives governing community development, youth projects, ILMs, environmental schemes and so on. As such it provides exemplars of how multi-dimensional regeneration can occur whilst placing the Trust at the forefront of policy and practice in the city. It uses its local expertise to ensure strategic involvement.

- How should the organisation position itself? There is a view that Groundwork should prioritise its activities in relation to what it is best known for doing: environmental improvements, landscaping, green access, environmental business, and land reclamation. But others within and outside Groundwork believe that this is a narrow view. 'Environmental' tasks can remain central to the organisation's core values, whilst at the same time providing a mechanism through which to engender a wider

programme of social and economic renewal. In the view of one independent observer, 'environmentalism could provide a common set of core activities and aspirations to help tie individuals and communities together' (Worpole, 2000, p. 17). If Groundwork does not pursue this wider agenda, who will?

### **Conclusions: the impact of Groundwork on partnerships**

As numerous commentators make clear, Trusts have proved consistently enthusiastic about developing, sustaining and invigorating partnerships. Because of the less than precise remit of many partnerships, and because their constitutions and membership often change, it is not possible to specify the exact consequences within any partnership of local Trust involvement. Nevertheless it is possible to identify a typology which outlines the range of Trust interventions we encountered:

- Trusts such as Groundwork East Lancashire, through its work on the Community Alliance, have been instrumental in forming partnerships.
- Elsewhere Trusts have worked with others to extend the constitution and remit of partnerships, for example Northern Ireland's brokering of the NOF partnership.
- Groundwork Macclesfield and Vale Royal was instrumental in bringing together (the only) two successful SRB partnerships in the district.

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- Trusts have worked with other agencies to improve partnership outputs; Groundwork Dearne Valley worked with local communities, local authorities and others to create a legal agreement underpinning its Stewardship Model designed to achieve longer term the sustainability of environmental improvements through the deployment of community based resources.
- The active involvement of Trusts within partnerships has helped to influence the behaviour and attitudes of others.

Finally, what elements of good practice characterise the effective engagement of Trusts with the wider institutional context?

- Openness to new ideas and the possibility of engaging with new partners and in new initiatives; Groundwork Manchester, for instance, has successfully tendered for work to undertake the environmental and physical development work within the local NDC partnership.
- Being able to bring to the table direct experience of local projects and programmes; effective embedding within partnerships often involves being able to reflect on the policy issues emerging from local initiatives and to disseminate these lessons to partner agencies.
- An ability to engage with a wide range of organisations and, often of critical importance, a wide range of individuals; Trusts were willing to test out the 'best' contact within local authorities; if one department in an authority proves less than helpful in partnership working, try another!
- A willingness to stick with partnerships; much of the work with local partnerships may be both relatively mundane and yet surprisingly contentious; case study work here shows the degree to which Trust staff are prepared to turn up to meetings, to respond to local issues, to engage in debate, and to seek solutions.

# 5 Groundwork: strategic development, leadership and innovation

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## Introduction

As previous chapters have made clear, Trusts have adopted innovative and effective approaches to area-based renewal. But arguably Groundwork can achieve as much in relation to the neighbourhoods where it works by influencing other organisations and their wider policy agendas as it can through direct delivery at local level. This chapter analyses Groundwork's contribution to policy development nationally and regionally.

## The wider policy environment

The incoming 1997 government instigated a series of constitutional and institutional changes:

- devolution of powers to elected institutions in Northern Ireland, Wales (and of course Scotland, where there are no Groundwork Trusts)
- a parallel increase in the 'regional dimension' of governance in England, epitomised by the establishment of the RDAs in 1999, and the prospective emergence of regional elected assemblies
- the replacement of TECs by Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), with a remit focusing on post-16 education and training and less on business support and job creation
- changes in the nature of local authority activity, in relation to local economic and community well-being, and the introduction of the 'Best Value' approach to the delivery of public services

- the expansion of the various New Deal programmes through a series of local delivery partnerships involving the Employment Service, trades unions, employers, further education colleges, careers companies, race equality councils and other voluntary sector agencies
- the commitment of National Lottery distributing bodies to giving priority to applications that address social and economic deprivation
- the establishment of a range of other partnerships and alliances around specific regeneration programmes such as the European Structural Funds
- the drive on the part of central government towards greater 'joined up' thinking and action with respect to policy design and implementation.

The departmental reorganisation following the 2001 general election may foreshadow further changes in the character of the institutional landscape.

## Groundwork and UK national policy

Interviews with key actors and other evidence reveal the extent to which Groundwork plays a role in the development of policy at the UK level. At present this influence is marked in some fields but undeveloped in others.

Developments include:

- Both the Chair of Groundwork and one of its National Board members served on the advisory Task Force for the New Deal.

According to one senior key actor interviewee, Groundwork has been highly influential both in the design and delivery of the New Deal programmes – things are being done differently because of its presence.

- Groundwork acted on behalf of the SEU as a local organiser of consultation events on the draft NSNR, and supplied members to two Policy Action Teams.
- It has exerted considerable influence over DfEE in relation to Intermediate Labour Market mechanisms, which it has helped to develop in several areas, and which have now become much more widespread.
- Its close relationship with DETR, involving senior civil servants and ministers alike, provides a sound basis for the continued development and expansion of Groundwork activity. These strong links also furnish opportunities to offer exemplars of good practice. This means that interchange between the two is not just about funding and programmes of activity, but can be instrumental in getting key messages and lessons emerging from the Groundwork experience into wider regeneration policy. DETR is also vital in terms of approving the establishment of new Trusts.
- National Assemblies have recently been established in Northern Ireland and Wales, both assuming new policy and funding responsibilities for regeneration. Groundwork staff at Trust level and at the level of Groundwork Wales have therefore had to develop new

relationships and strategies; these are discussed below.

However, there are policy domains where Groundwork appears to have had relatively little involvement in national debate:

- Although Groundwork is heavily involved locally in action on health and education-related matters, there is little evidence of it being involved in policy debates on these subjects at national level.
- Similarly, there are few high-level formal links between Groundwork and the National Lottery distributors, especially in relation to membership of their Boards or Advisory Committees. The New Opportunities Fund apart, there is limited evidence of Groundwork being involved even in informal discussion and liaison with these major funding bodies on such matters.

### **Devolution in Northern Ireland and Wales**

In both Wales and Northern Ireland, Groundwork has successfully established itself at the heart of the policy-making process. The precise mechanisms through which local decision-making has been developed and the authority vested in the two Assemblies vary. However, there are some common elements.

Groundwork Wales (established in early 1997 and carrying with it a wealth of practical experience through a former Welsh Trust executive director) has developed its role as a mouthpiece for the Welsh Trusts: in lobbying the Assembly, sitting on advisory committees (for Objective 1, New Deal for the Unemployed, and



the co-ordination of environmental business services). It has also been helpful in interpreting policy and feeding this intelligence out to the Trusts.

The Assembly inherited the Welsh Office's regeneration objectives and there is thus a resonance between Groundwork's approaches and the Assembly's declared values based on partnership, inclusiveness, better education, better health and quality of life.

The Welsh Assembly has altered the wider policy context in which the Welsh Trusts operate. Groundwork MRCT recognises the importance of raising its profile with the Assembly locally. The Taff Bargoed and Gurnos projects have both helped: the Cabinet Minister responsible for Transport and Environment led the way with an early project visit. Media coverage through the BBC's *Charlie's Garden Army* has raised the profile of Greencare at Cefn Pennar.

In Northern Ireland the approach has been similar although the Executive Director has no network of Trusts to represent and inform. She has concentrated on raising the profile of Groundwork at the highest level to influence policy development. This has included:

- the production of the *Changing Places Changing Lives Changing Minds* campaign (supported by a video)
- discussions with each major party leader
- attendance at recent party conferences to build awareness and commitment among Assembly members and local councillors
- regular visits to Stormont and close working with key partners and agencies tackling the same range of problems

- a local community worker and Groundwork Board Member who has recently become a life peer has also given valuable opportunities to raise issues – and the Groundwork profile – in the House of Lords.

The consequences of this campaign have not simply been to the benefit of Groundwork. There is now a strategic alliance between a variety of key public sector players across the province where none previously existed.

### Groundwork and English regionalism

The RDAs are now firmly embedded within the policy framework. The 2000 Comprehensive Spending Review suggested that the government plans to enhance the status of RDAs, providing them with greater operational flexibility. Of course the 'regional dimension' is not restricted to RDAs: Government Offices for the Regions (GORs) remain key players and, according to a Performance and Innovation Unit report, will play a more critical role in co-ordinating and disseminating central government policy in the regions (PIU, 2000). This will certainly be the case for the neighbourhood agenda, since GORs' responsibilities now include accrediting Local Strategic Partnerships, reviewing and commenting on Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, and recommending the choice of Neighbourhood Management pathfinders.

Both Groundwork UK and individual Trusts are fully aware of the need to engage with these regional institutions. A key national figure in the organisation saw this 'as the single most important external issue for the organisation'. A

## The Groundwork movement

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substantial proportion of the new resources going to Groundwork UK are designed to enhance the regional dimension. Indeed, this activity is already taking shape, advancing on the foundations built up by both individual Trusts and regional Groundwork networks. However, there are variations across England in the extent to which Trusts engage with and influence the key regional agencies. In part this reflects the current spread of Trusts geographically, and in consequence, the regional structures that have been adopted within Groundwork.

The growth of Trusts across England has been highly uneven as outlined in Table 1. These variations inevitably affect Groundwork's ability, thus far, to establish a significant presence within all of the new regional structures.

The number of Trusts in a region is only part of the story. In the West Midlands the RDA (Advantage West Midlands) is enthusiastic about the role that Groundwork can play in area regeneration. Groundwork Black Country is already acting as both a strategic and operational partner. It is seen as having a key

**Table 1 Distribution of Trusts across English regions**

Region	Trusts
Eastern England	1
East Midlands*	6
London	5
North East	3
North West	12
South East	4
South West	1
West Midlands	4
Yorkshire and the Humber*	4

\*The county of Lincolnshire straddles the boundaries of EMDA and Yorkshire Forward.

role in helping to link deprived communities into the strategic economic zones to be designated under the Regional Economic Strategy. In contrast, although there is the same number of Trusts in the South East, the position of Groundwork at regional level is less well established. Current relationships between individual Trusts and the South East Economic Development Agency are only just starting to develop.

As is to be expected most progress has been made in the North West, a Groundwork heartland, and London. Developments include:

- considerable previous involvement in regional scale programmes
- a relatively long history of collaborative partnership working with key regional agencies; this has helped other organisations appreciate what Groundwork can do and how it does it
- concentration of activity in a region with considerable scope for environmental innovation, encouraging Trusts to think carefully about engaging with regional players
- an acknowledgement by both Groundwork and its partners that it must put in place structures and frameworks that will improve its capacity to participate in regional and sub-regional working, and in turn its ability to deliver at that scale
- the commissioning of an independent assessment of how this process of organisational change might be taken forward

- long experience of sharing activities, such as youth programmes, across Trusts in the area.

It is anticipated that every region in England will have a 'generic' regional resource, the scale reflecting the extent of the Groundwork presence regionally. This resource is designed to achieve several objectives:

- helping ensure that Groundwork is embedded within the regional framework of institutions
- providing a 'light greening' touch over a wider area than is usually the remit of individual Trusts
- becoming more responsive to regional development strategies
- bringing expertise in community-based regeneration to a wider spectrum of local partners and agencies.

Groundwork is also producing a series of regional development strategies, to be completed during 2001, offering a basis for:

- setting priorities for establishing new and extending existing Trusts
- developing alternative approaches to the delivery of services
- identifying and securing resources to support regional partnerships
- improving intra-Trust management and cost-effectiveness
- helping with fundraising

- providing cross-cutting services in areas such as human resources, training, disseminating good practice
- very occasionally helping out Trusts which may have run into particular difficulties.

### **Groundwork's role in local regeneration strategies and partnerships**

LSPs provide another forum on which many Groundwork Trusts will wish to be fully represented. Functions assumed of LSPs include improving mainstream services, sharing best practice, and drawing on (and developing) expertise within community and voluntary sectors. LSPs will be charged with assisting local authorities in drawing up community strategies designed to enhance the 'quality of life of local communities through action to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area and its inhabitants' (DETR, 2000, p. 8). It seems likely that, over time, the Government will wish to direct a wider range of funding streams through LSPs. Evidence developed in previous chapters of this report points to the potential synergies between what Trusts are doing locally and strategic issues addressed by LSPs. Groundwork's experience of intensive area-based regeneration rooted in strong community involvement and effective partner engagement are likely to prove of considerable value to LSPs and their constituent partners. However, it is not clear whether, in all the case study areas, Groundwork can necessarily expect a seat at what is likely to prove crowded LSP tables. It should be a priority for many Trusts to try to ensure that

they are. This is particularly important as Groundwork's ability to 'join up' different policy agendas noted above is extremely difficult to achieve if it is relegated to a series of single policy based working groups underneath the LSP.

In part this is because, as is apparent in both the Rogers Urban Task Force Report and the associated White Paper, 'environmental issues' are seen as being of central importance for any programme of sustainable regeneration. From a Groundwork perspective, much of this new urban agenda is to be welcomed: it embraces environmental considerations and perceives socio-economic considerations as central to the 'environment'. Policies designed to increase brownfield development should provide a useful context within which Groundwork can pursue its own broad objectives.

Individual Trusts are also having to keep abreast of the far-reaching changes associated with the 'modernising local government' agenda. Through this, the government has placed an increasing stress on the need to renew local democratic institutions. This agenda has important implications for Groundwork. The widely perceived need to strengthen local involvement and democracy chimes perfectly with Groundwork's mission. But there are at least two other more specific considerations which may increasingly impinge on activities of Trusts:

- The central thrust of Best Value in local government is often seen to lie in the 'consult–challenge–compare–compete' model; Groundwork might have much to offer here in relation to its experience in terms of consultation and – in some

instances – its ability to compare with any other public or voluntary organisation in relation to the delivery of area based regeneration programmes.

- As debate unfolds surrounding Local Public Service Agreements, Trusts may well find themselves in a position to bid for the delivery of certain types of work.

### Conclusions

The national regeneration policy agenda has been converging with that of Groundwork over the past few years, emerging from the good practice developed by Groundwork (and others) over the period. The NSNR resonates with Groundwork's aims, objectives and operating principles – but the same could be said of a number of organisations. The national strategy has many progenitors. Nevertheless, the relevance of Groundwork's experience to the neighbourhood renewal agenda is already recognised. There are discussions about a programme of staff exchanges between local Trusts and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

Although Groundwork has not reached every part of the policy universe, there are numerous examples where its influence is extensive and evident, disproportionate to the scale of its activities. As one interviewee put it, the organisation is capable of punching above its weight.

Unsurprisingly the impacts are greatest where they have been systematically planned. In Northern Ireland, there was a clear recognition of the constraints on local action as a result of Groundwork's limited (and largely negative) profile among the key actors. But a

successful campaign raised the organisation's profile, reputation and influence – and in so doing helped forge strategic partnerships, across the province, that had not previously existed.

There is a similar story in Wales: the creation of Groundwork Wales helped position Groundwork within the policy-making mechanisms of the Welsh Assembly. The organisation is now recognised as having the credibility and legitimacy to be a key element within the regeneration policy-making framework.

Groundwork has clearly recognised the challenges posed by English regionalism. However, the separation of functions between RDAs and GORs (with the former concentrating increasingly on competitiveness, the latter on neighbourhoods and social exclusion) means that Groundwork must seek to influence both. In the final chapter we set out our conclusions, and our recommendations on how Groundwork can best respond to the opportunities – and threats – the new policy agenda presents.

# 6 Conclusions, lessons and recommendations

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## Introduction

For an organisation like Groundwork, attempting to identify impacts and outcomes through a comparison of inputs and outputs is relatively unilluminating. As the DETR review of Groundwork pointed out, regeneration is a process, particularly the community-based work that is Groundwork's forte. Assessing its impact and effectiveness therefore requires subtler approaches and judgements. Groundwork is aware of the need for measurable and meaningful performance indicators, and a recent report, commissioned by Groundwork, will offer some further illumination (New Economics Foundation, 2001). We set out here a summary of our main conclusions, including our assessment of Groundwork's strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats it faces for the future. Finally, we set out the lessons that emerge from the study for policy-makers and funders, local government, other regeneration and neighbourhood renewal practitioners, and finally Groundwork itself.

## Strengths and weaknesses

In summary, Groundwork emerges from this study as an organisation that has:

- evolved from its origins as an environmental agency operating on the urban fringe into a body which has had some success in community development and promoting community involvement in some of the nation's worst inner city estates and neighbourhoods

- used its independence as an arm's length body to develop flexibility, and the capacity to operate in radical and innovative ways that connect with the concerns of local communities
- in the process, been effective in leveraging in other agencies
- shown persistence in all of this, recognising that in the most deprived neighbourhoods there are no quick fixes: the long-term presence of independent agencies like Groundwork is positively viewed by local communities themselves.

These conclusions emerge from and reflect the organisation's main strengths which include:

- the capacity to develop trust within communities that have felt neglected
- demonstrable commitment by staff, though as we discuss below, sometimes at the price of self-exploitation
- a greater independence of action locally than most statutory agencies, which is partly a function of recruitment and management styles, but above all culture
- the reputation this bestows as an organisation that gets on with things
- its capacity to identify and raise funds, including in some cases on behalf of the statutory agencies that fund it
- an understanding of the policy process and how to influence policy-makers

- its co-operative rather than competitive ethos
- a talent to join it all up at local level
- finally, and in some ways most importantly, Groundwork's willingness to go where other agencies won't.

But like any other agency, there are weaknesses:

- a lack of administrative rigour (which may be inseparable from the flexibility described above)
- relative inattention to monitoring
- concerns among some Groundwork staff that the organisation pays insufficient attention to black and minority ethnic issues
- insufficient attention to marketing and publicity, particularly locally
- uneven links to the private sector, especially in the context of neighbourhood renewal activities.

### Opportunities and threats

As we have discussed throughout this report, there are likely to be major opportunities for Groundwork as a result of the neighbourhood renewal strategy, both locally and nationally. The similarities in value and operating methods between the national strategy and what Groundwork has been doing in recent years mean that there are some important lessons to offer, both to LSPs and to the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

But there are threats as well. First, other organisations are currently in the process of positioning themselves to address the neighbourhood renewal agenda, which means that new competition may be entering Groundwork's 'territory'. For example, many RSLs are seeking to develop the capacity to engage in neighbourhood based, community led interventions that extend beyond housing management. The strategy is encouraging the development of 'intermediary' organisations to deliver community based services – and while this could include Groundwork, other agencies are bound to be attracted to the field.

However, the scale of the neighbourhood renewal 'marketplace' over the next few years is substantial. There is a widespread perception, among national and local government officials alike, that the lack of capacity on a sufficient scale is a very real threat to the national strategy. Groundwork's ability to help fill that capacity gap will be welcome.

Groundwork as an organisation is not immune to the capacity problem however. As we have commented in the study, staff already appear to view Groundwork as in some sense a training or development opportunity (and this may be seen as a valuable contribution in itself). But there is likely to be a substantial increase in employment opportunities in regeneration and neighbourhood renewal over the next few years, many of which are likely to be attractive to existing Groundwork staff. This may therefore increase turnover within Groundwork.

The neighbourhood renewal strategy brings with it a change in funding approaches. There are to be no further rounds of the SRB which has

supported many of the projects reviewed here. RDAs are drawing up criteria and processes for the new 'single pot', and although these will vary between regions, they will not always lend themselves to the kinds of comprehensive neighbourhood based activity discussed here. They are more likely to focus on competitiveness and business performance (although in most cases this will include social enterprise).

### Lessons and recommendations

#### Policy-makers and funders

Particularly in the context of the neighbourhood renewal strategy, there is a variety of lessons emerging from this study for policy-makers and funders:

- The process of rebuilding neighbourhoods that have suffered underinvestment and neglect over decades is necessarily long term. This is at least partially recognised in *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001), but the notion of relatively short catalytic interventions still survives – for example, in the three year limit currently on Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (as well as Community Empowerment Fund and Community Chest) support. But the Groundwork experience suggests that the process is not helped by setting deadlines for withdrawal, even if they are ten years distant.
- The issue of timescales also applies to the speed with which it is possible to stimulate community based activity in the

most disadvantaged areas. On the 3Gs estate in Merthyr Tydfil, there had been a community development presence for some years before it was possible to engage the community in meaningful comprehensive strategy development. Expectations in the case of the NDC programme are far more ambitious, perhaps unrealistically so.

- The study shows a number of examples where Groundwork has concentrated on building community capacity, and has successfully handed over projects for local communities to manage – but they have retained a local presence so that communities continue to have support.
- These points have clear implications for the design of funding regimes. They suggest first, that funding provision needs to be longer rather than shorter term (a point at least partially recognised by government). But they also suggest that outcome expectations, at least in the early years of funding, need to reflect the scale of the challenge. We are not advocating a return to the days of core funding. But the study clearly shows that substantial community development has to take place if *genuinely community-led solutions* are to be generated. This has implications for the character of project appraisal and monitoring requirements, and for the speed with which interventions can be expected to generate outcomes.
- The neighbourhood renewal strategy has set national targets, but in practice



focuses resources on the 88 most deprived local authority districts in England. Groundwork is active in many of these (and plans to increase its presence in others). However, in a number of the case studies, Groundwork is tackling small pockets of often intense deprivation, in local authority districts that as a whole appear relatively affluent. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit may wish to consider the lessons offered by Groundwork's experience in these areas for the delivery of the national strategy outside the 88 target districts.

- There is now substantial experience within Groundwork, both centrally and in local Trusts, of the design and implementation of community-led neighbourhood initiatives. This should be reflected in the development of the Skills and Knowledge Management strategy that the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is committed to produce.
- As we discuss below, Groundwork's experience can also be of value to LSPs – but it is not clear whether Groundwork is sufficiently major a player to command a seat at most of the LSPs where it operates. LSPs could be encouraged to work with Groundwork as advisers where they are not full members.

### **Local authorities and other local partners**

Much of what is distinctive about Groundwork's approach, which is those aspects that account for its success, derives intrinsically from its structure, its independence, and its ability therefore to operate as a neutral

intermediary. By definition, local authorities will not be able to emulate every aspect of the Groundwork approach – nor should they try. Although some local authorities in our study felt that they should have been doing what Groundwork was doing, others recognised the intrinsic differences, and were content therefore to concentrate on their own enabling role, leaving Groundwork to concentrate on community based delivery. Given Groundwork's capacity to act as a 'neutral intermediary', it may have a valuable role to play in helping broker the difficult partnership issues that will be faced in many areas as LSPs are established.

But there are more general lessons from the study, which are likely to be of value to many local authorities and their partners in neighbourhood renewal:

- The environment is a powerful tool with which to commence activities in deprived and neglected communities: it is relatively uncontentious, an issue on which everyone has a view, an area which offers relatively quick and visible wins, and can contribute massively to the restoration of community confidence.
- A flexible approach, free of bureaucracy, is essential if the confidence of disenchanted communities is to be secured. In almost all the case studies, local residents were unanimous in their *perceptions* of Groundwork staff as more flexible, helpful and determined than those from the statutory agencies. Not all these differences can be explained by structural factors: as the neighbourhood renewal consultation draft recognised,

there is substantial scope to increase the sensitivity of those on the front line of public services to the needs of their 'customers'.

- There can be no assumption that quick fixes will work. We recognise that this can present difficulties for local authorities, which have to respond to the needs of neighbourhoods across the district, often with limited and diminishing resources. By contrast Groundwork may only operate in one or two neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, the study offers a practical illustration of the impact on community confidence that comes when residents are persuaded that there is an agency that is committed to them in the longer term.

### Groundwork

The messages from this study for Groundwork are largely positive. We found few willing to offer substantial criticism of the case study Trusts. But both internal and external interviewees said that performance was uneven. One senior interviewee thought there was scope for greater consistency of quality standards – an issue for Groundwork UK as the implications of the new federal structure become clear.

There are issues for Groundwork to address, if the quality of activity identified here is to be maintained and spread.

- 1 In many areas Trusts will have to manage the shift from SRB to neighbourhood renewal with careful planning: for the reasons discussed throughout the study, Trusts do not always give great thought to the issue of exit strategies. It will be

necessary, with some urgency, to begin the process of planning for alternative sources of funding to replace the SRB as schemes come to an end.

- 2 Wherever Groundwork operations overlap with the 88 target areas, there needs to be a review of strategy (and tactics) to maximise Trusts' influence with LSPs as they emerge over the next few months. It will not always be possible to secure membership of the full LSP, but Trusts will want to ensure their influence is not limited to membership of a variety of subgroups.
- 3 The breadth of Groundwork's experience is not widely appreciated. Although Groundwork UK has the main responsibility for marketing and dissemination, there is scope for local Trusts to disseminate the lessons of their experience more widely to local partners.
- 4 If Groundwork is to help develop capacity for neighbourhood renewal, it must ensure it maintains and develops its own capacity internally. This may involve:
  - ensuring that staff recruitment specifications are consistent with the new neighbourhood agenda
  - ensuring that existing staff have access to training and other development opportunities to help them keep up with the new policy environment
  - exploring ways of improving the routes to full-time employment in neighbourhood renewal (both within Groundwork and among partners) for

local residents, especially those who have developed skills and experience through volunteering.

- 5 As this study has shown, there are some tensions between Groundwork's aspiration to act catalytically, and therefore to limit the time it spends in any

locality; and the scale of what has to be done in the most disadvantaged areas, and therefore the time needed to do it. In the light of this study, there should be a review across Groundwork of this issue, to clarify the circumstances where a long-term presence is required and justified.

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