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Electoral  
 Reform  
 Society  
Scotland

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# Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities Deliberating Local Democracy

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ERS Scotland  
*April 2019*



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This report republishes the content of the Our Democracy coalition's report *Act As If We Own The Place: Remaking Our Democracy, Strengthening Our Communities*



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# Foreword

By Lesley Riddoch  
Author, broadcaster and  
activist

It was a throwaway line at a meeting several years ago, but “Act as if we own the place” still sums up the change Scotland needs right now. In communities all over the country, folk have tiptoed around the powers that be – government, landowners and all – for years, decades, even centuries. Once Scotland had truly local councils, but many were fiefdoms run by the great and good and maybe that’s why few wept when they were swept away. Now we have regional-sized authorities masquerading as local councils. Most elected members try hard to cover wards the size of small countries, but the structures make that impossible. In Scotland 170k people make up one “local’ council. Across the EU the figure is 10k. Our councils are too big. Power is too centralised and most people stay in places they cannot shape, influence or easily throw their energies into improving.

This much, some politicians will acknowledge. What’s been missing so far are proposals for change. This book starts that long overdue process. The Electoral Reform Society Scotland is to be congratulated for pouring so much energy and creativity into the process of reviving our local democracy. All over Scotland, groups of people

Reclaiming Our Coalfield  
Communities, 2018,  
Dalmellington

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have been meeting at their suggestion to consider truly local issues, “as if they owned the place” – as if they had formal political power for just an evening, within the genuine, organic community they really care about. It’s been fabulous and energising just watching from the sidelines – and very timely.

The Scottish Government’s backing for a Citizens’ Assembly to shape Scotland’s future is a massive endorsement for people power, participative democracy and for the ERS processes used and described in this book. It’s an acknowledgement that the structures of our present representative democracy – MSPs, MPs, Councillors and a’ that – fail to harness the vast reserves of energy, experience and commitment present in every community. It’s an admission that party politics has limitations and citizens are often more able to drop the red lines, hear all sides, act pragmatically and find enough agreement to act.

If Ireland can do it – and they have used Citizens Assemblies to change the law on abortion and equal marriage – Scotland can do it. And if Scotland can do it at a national level, then local communities can do it too.

In the next decade, well facilitated, punter-led deliberative processes will prove they can crack important stuck local problems like access to land, affordable housing and changing procurement so schools and hospitals cut Food Miles by using locally grown produce.

The future won’t look like the past – so the way Scotland escapes from its top-down, centralised past could offer inspiration across the world. Congratulations to the ERS Scotland, for starting that journey with this wee innovative book.





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# Introduction

By Willie Sulivan  
Director ERS Scotland

There can be little doubt that over 20 years on, devolution has been a good thing for Scottish politics. Our politics is more open than Westminster and due to our electoral system it is certainly more representative. However, there is a growing concern that despite devolution, Scotland is still one of the least locally democratic countries in Europe. The average population size at the local democratic level in Europe is 17,241, compared to 169,525 in Scotland - ten times as big. Likewise, the average land area of local authorities in Europe is 38 square kilometres, compared to 2,502 square kilometres in Scotland - over 65 times as large. It is not surprising that people in Scotland feel out of touch with local politics and unable to make their voices heard. Information gathered in 2016 by a BMG poll highlighted that 73% of Scots feel like they have little to no influence on the decisions councillors make, and 60% of Scots don't even know what their councillor does.

These findings, along with the countervailing statistic that 45% of Scots are willing to give up time every month to help their council make decisions on local services, show that much more needs to be done to scope out new ways for people

Act As If... Council, Govan,  
Glasgow, 2017

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to engage with local decision making. This need for radical reform also highlighted an opportunity for ERS Scotland to campaign for a new democratic model that is deliberative, local, participatory and collaborative. A new democratic model that puts power back into the hands of the people, allowing citizens to make decisions about the places where they live.

As part of our ongoing campaign to improve the state of local democracy and governance, we felt it was important to not just talk about what changes we would like to see, but to actually experiment and test new democratic approaches that can show how politics can be done differently. The 'Act As If We Own The Place' initiative, led by ERS Scotland on behalf of the Our Democracy Coalition, was launched in January 2017. This initiative sought to put into practice the simple idea behind the local democracy campaign: that human beings flourish when they have control over their own lives.

Throughout 2017 we held six 'Act as if Councils' in communities across Scotland, in Dundee, Glasgow, Kirriemuir, Dunblane, Oban, and Dumfries. These Community Assemblies, or mini-publics, asked citizens to gather together and 'act as if they own the place', giving them the opportunity to discuss the issues that matter to them, imagining what they would do if they were in charge. These deliberative events are, of course, worthwhile activities in themselves, but we also used them as opportunities to experiment and test new democratic models, methods and tools. This way we could learn deliberative techniques first hand that can be used in local democratic decision making in Scotland. This knowledge has been extremely important in informing our recent submission to the Scottish Government's consultation on local governance - Democracy Matters.

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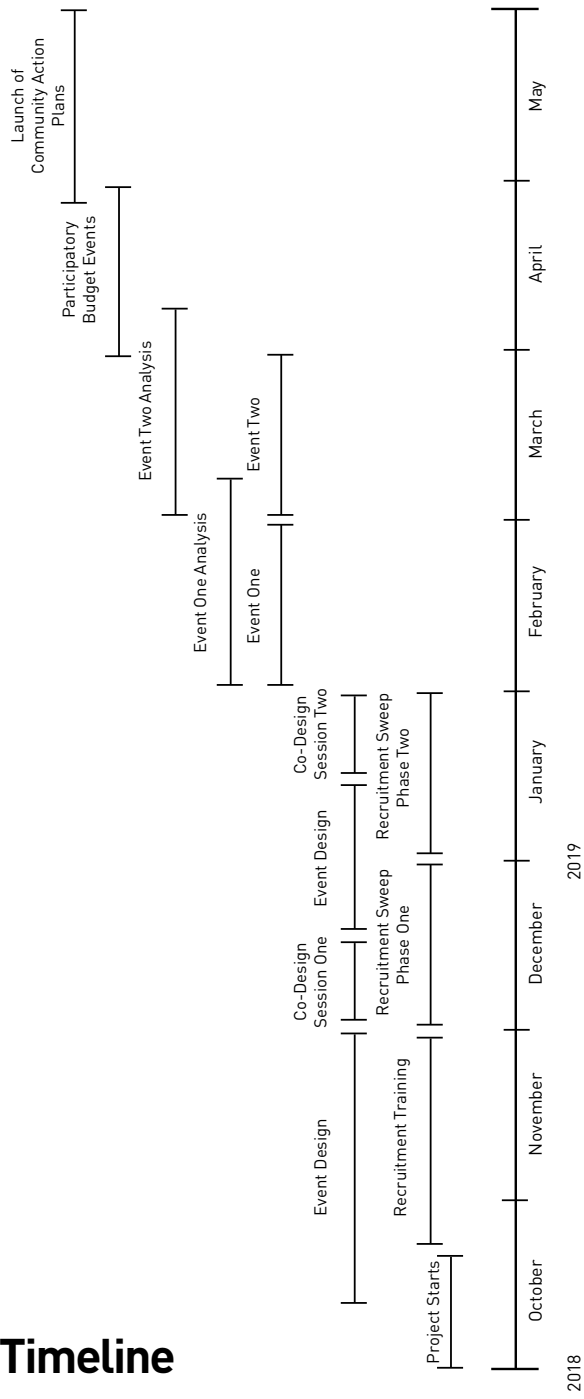
The follow on from these ‘Act As If..’ events, which is the focus of this report, was run in collaboration with Coalfields Regeneration Trust, as there was direct crossover between their Coalfields Community Futures programme and the intentions behind the ‘Act As If..’ campaign. This publication highlights the background, ideas, processes and outcomes of this collaborative experiment in local democracy and the details and learnings are highlighted in the pages that follow. We hope it inspires new experiments, but we also hope that it leads to radical reform that addresses the democratic deficit that exists in Scotland.

Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities was a collaborative eight month project that ran from October 2017 - May 2018 and was organised as part of Coalfield Regeneration Trust's (CRT) Coalfields Community Futures programme and The Electoral Reform Society Scotland's (ERS) Our Democracy: Act as if We Own the Place campaign.

ERS Scotland and CRT came together with the joint objective and ambition of empowering people to take control of their communities through a series of deliberative and decision-making events. Rather than relying on politicians and representatives to make decisions for us, the Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities project sought to provide a democratic space for citizens to voice their own needs and aspirations, identify, prioritise, organise collectively and plan for their future.

Providing the political platform for community members to come together, discuss ideas and participate directly in decision-making was intended to build capacity and strengthen the ability of the communities to define and achieve their own objectives. More than this, however, the project sought to decentralise political

# Project Timeline





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decision making, showing what local democracy could look like if we put power back into the hands of the people.

The project was structured around six deliberative and three participatory budgeting events that took place in the ex-mining communities of Bo'ness in Falkirk, Cardenden in Fife, and Dalmellington in Ayrshire. Each of these communities was coming to the end or had recently finished a Five Year Action Plan that had been developed and carried out with support from CRT. This project provided an opportunity for these communities to reflect on what had been achieved over the past five years, while also highlighting what issues still remain, or what new issues or concerns may have emerged. These priorities, along with the actions that would address them and the vision for the community's future, would be documented in a new Five Year Community Action Plan. Ultimately, the events brought different people from the communities together to make new connections and deliberate on what their individual and collective aspirations were for the next five years - and beyond.



the coalfields  
regeneration trust

### **Coalfields Regeneration Trust**

Since 1999 Coalfields Regeneration Trust have worked with coalfield communities throughout the UK to respond to the challenges they face. Their aim is to support and develop community capacity in a number of different ways and community-led regeneration is at the heart of CRT's approach.

A key way that CRT supports coalfield communities is through its Community Futures programme, which *“is an approach to local community planning and sustainable community development that aims to encourage active citizenship and build local democracy.”*

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Working with 40 communities in Scotland over the past seven years, CRT had developed a tried and tested Community Futures method that supported communities to build on the aspirations of their members in order find sustainable and long term solutions to community development and regeneration. The collaboration between ERS Scotland and CRT created the opportunity for a new approach to be trialled, which would still achieve the original objectives of the Community Futures programme, while embedding a more deliberative, participatory and directly democratic system into the process.

### **Aims and Objectives**

By combining their expertise and knowledge, CRT and ERS worked together to fulfil certain aims and objectives, both organisationally and for the participating communities:

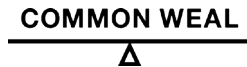
- Highlight how local democracy can be done differently
- Show that people are willing and able to take control over their communities
- Develop an understanding of how we can institutionalise the process of Community-led Action Planning, creating a new level of local democracy
- Show that deliberative democracy is a decision making model that can be used effectively at the community level
- Experiment with new innovative and creative democratic methods and processes
- Build community capacity

# Coalition Members Include...

- Electoral
- Reform
- Society



the  
stove  
network



Nesta...

Citizen  
Participation  
Network

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## **Our Democracy Coalition**

Although initiated by ERS Scotland and Coalfield Regeneration Trust, The Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities project was part of the wider “Act As If We Own the Place” political campaign, developed by the Our Democracy Coalition. Our Democracy was formed in 2016, bringing together a collective of organisations, campaigners and politicians who are dedicated to improving local democracy.

The campaign arose from a simple idea: that human beings flourish when they have control over their own lives.

Our Democracy believes that the vast majority of Scots realise that freedom and power are best exercised by communities. As lone individuals we can potentially do some good, but when we collaborate and work together, we have so much more power; we create better ideas, build better places, and have more fun in the process. Working and organising in the interests of our friends and neighbours means they work in our interests too. By doing this we not only find out how capable we all are, we also build trust in ourselves and in each other.

At the moment most of us do not have the power to make important decisions at the community level; power is exercised over us by the government, by the council, or by companies who don't work with our community interests at their core.

If democracy is about anything it is about citizens being able to run their own affairs. That is why Our Democracy have been asking people to ‘act as if we own the place’. Since 2016, the coalition has encouraged communities all over Scotland to hold ‘Act As If’ Councils; these events bring local people together to talk about how they want to run their communities. The plan is that talk turns into action and people go beyond acting

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as if they own the place, to actually owning it. The success of these mini-publics shows that people are willing and able to work together to make decisions for themselves. Communities are ready to redesign their local democracy to work better for them, allowing them to flourish by taking control of their community's future.





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WORLD COMMUNITY  
Act as if You Own the Place

It has been highly publicised and debated in recent years that democracies across the world are in crisis. Many people have blamed citizens themselves for this supposed crisis, claiming people are politically apathetic or do not have the knowledge, skill or expertise to engage in political decision-making. However, our contemporary system of representative democracy leaves few opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process and people feel increasingly alienated from those that do hold power. Far from being the fault of citizens, it should be clear that much of the disengagement arises from a sense of frustration with the design of the existing system and the unequal distribution of power that stems from it. Rather than trying to encourage people to participate in a flawed system which poorly represents and aggregates citizens' interests, giving them little scope to even express those interests in the first place, more needs to be done to reform and redesign the political system, building a democracy where every citizen is empowered to take part.

Democracy is not a system that comes in one shape or form. At ERS Scotland we believe that it

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is the political system itself that needs to reform, from a passive representative model to a participatory model that promotes the active engagement of citizens. There is a need to create democratic opportunities for civic engagement at all levels of society, particularly at the local level, which would give citizens direct power within their communities.

For many political thinkers this is not purely an issue of institutional reform that would lead to improved decision-making; not just one form of government over another. Instead, it is argued, as it has been for centuries, that political participation and active citizenship is necessary for the full development of human beings. The purpose of political reform is therefore not purely quantitative; it is not just about more people voting or more people joining political parties. It is also qualitative, as the nature of our politics affects our very nature as human beings. It is not just about more democracy, but better forms of democracy.

Over the past few decades a new democratic model - deliberative democracy - has emerged. It proposes an alternative to our outdated system, emphasising communication, respect and active participation as necessary features of democratic decision making. Whereas our current system seeks to aggregate votes in an attempt to satisfy the needs and desires of the largest number of people possible, deliberative democracy sees politics as a forum where there needs to be spaces and places for citizens to meet and discuss political issues. It is not just any form of discussion that is deemed acceptable. Deliberative democracy encourages respectful conversation among equals, that makes those participating reflect on their own preferences and prejudices. By engaging with citizens from different backgrounds, with diverse

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beliefs, values and views, deliberative democracy expects citizens to provide reasons for their opinions which are justified in reference to a common good, not just their self-interest.

There have been a number of experiments in the form that deliberative democracy can take. These include citizen juries, planning cells, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, citizen assemblies and mini-publics. Despite there being different models, used for different issues or at different scales, some principles and technical elements must remain in place. For instance, it is important that those participating in a deliberative forum are demographically representative of the larger population - whether that be the population of a village, city, or state. Most deliberative events also follow a three stage process: a learning phase, deliberative phase, and decision-making phase. The Reclaiming Your Coalfield Communities project based its process and intentions around the political aims and values of deliberative democracy, in particular mini-publics, and provides an example of how this alternative democratic model could be used in communities throughout Scotland.

The details of the deliberative events that took place will be discussed in more detail below, but it is important to state that these workshops were not just consultation events, where the views and opinions of community members were collected to inform the decision-making of elected representatives. These events were about citizens making decisions for themselves and then acting upon them. It was not about politicians telling citizens this is what we will do for you; instead it was about citizens deciding what they wanted politicians to do for them, or what they wanted to do for themselves.





The communities of Bo'ness, Cardenden and Dalmellington are each unique, situated in different parts of the country, with their own characters, cultures, issues and aspirations. However, each of the communities are ex-mining towns that have suffered to differing degrees and in differing ways from the decline of the coal mining industry and the associated socio-economic issues that post-industrialisation so often entails.

Alongside these social and economic disadvantages, citizens from Bo'ness, Cardenden and Dalmellington are also facing an increasingly centralised and alienating political system - in Scotland and the UK - which does not distribute democratic power equally and is in desperate need of reform. Furthermore, with de-industrialisation the role and strength of trade unions have also been diminished. These grassroots organisations, which for so long provided the political and social foundations for these communities, no longer have the same power, influence or ability to voice their members' needs and demands as they used to.

To add to the list of systemic issues, as already highlighted the local democratic system in Scotland, is one of the worst in Europe, with very little

The Bo'ness Mining Memorial, unveiled in 2007, highlights the ever present influence mining history and heritage have on coalfield communities

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representation or decision making power devolved to the community level. There is a pressing need for both bottom-up and top-down change: there is a bottom-up need to rekindle a political voice and build capacity - economic, political and social - within these communities, creating grassroots momentum; and a top-down need to create new local democratic systems and institutions, where real power is devolved so that the communities can make decisions for themselves.

Today the citizens of Bo'ness, Cardenden and Dalmellington wish to celebrate their proud history and heritage, much of which goes further back than their industrial mining past. Yet they also wish to forge new identities based on existing and potential community assets, which will create new opportunities for current and future generations.

### **Bo'ness and Blackness**

The Bo'ness (short for Borrowstounness) and Blackness council ward is situated on the south bank of the Firth of Forth and stretches from the industrial fringes of Grangemouth in the west to the wooded boundary of Hopetoun Estate, by Blackness, in the east.

The town is steeped in history: as well as being one of the first places in Scotland to mine for coal, the town is at the eastern end of the Roman Antonine Wall – now a World Heritage Site. As a



Bo'ness Coat of Arms



Blackness Castle

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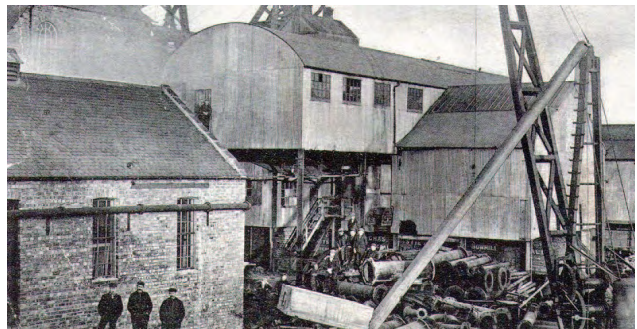
shore town the city has had a long history as a commercial port, which closed in 1959 due in large part to the downturn of the Scottish coal industry. Bo'ness is also home to Scotland's first purpose-built and still functioning cinema, the Hippodrome, and the Scottish Railway Preservation Society's Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway, a heritage track used for steam trains.

One of the local centrepieces of the town is Kinneil House, based in Kinneil Estate, a historic house originally built in the 16th century which attracts a steady stream of tourists to the area. The village of Blackness is home to the impressive Blackness Castle that was built in the 15th century. Today, Bo'ness is also a commuter town with many of its residents travelling to work in Edinburgh, Glasgow or Falkirk.

### **Cardenden**

The community of Cardenden is actually made up of the linked villages of Auchterderran, Bowhill, Cardenden and Dundonald (know locally as ABCD). The area is located in the Kingdom of Fife, on the River Ore, near Lochgelly.

There is evidence that people have lived on the site since before the 11th century and by the 16th century people were beginning to use the River Ore to power water mills. Coal began to be mined by 1600 and by the mid 19th century there were



An old mining colliery in Bowhill, Cardenden



several major coal pits in the area. The abundance of coal led to a growing population as people moved to the area for work. Coal mining increasingly became a defining feature of the area and by the 1950s and 60s several thousand men were employed in the various local pits. For hundreds of years mining had brought secure employment and stability to the area, however, in only a few years, by 1968, all the pits had closed. The area of Cardenden had, in many ways, been grown out of the coal industry and its decline led to a steep rise in unemployment and a long period of economic decline and disadvantage which still affects the community today.

The importance of the mining industry to the area is highlighted in the recent film *The Happy Lands* (2013) which depicts the miners strike of 1926.



Dalmellington Coat of Arms

## Dalmellington

The Dalmellington community, which includes the local villages of Burnton, Bellsbank and Waterside, is an ancient settlement dating back 6,000 years. From the early eighteenth century the village began to mine for coal and by the mid twentieth century the village had grown considerably due to the growth of the mining and ironworks industry. With the decline of mining the community has struggled, as it suffers, like



Loch Doon

the the majority of ex-mining communities, from economic and social problems due to unemployment and lack of investment.

More recently the community has tried to turn Dalmellington into a tourist destination, capitalising on the beautiful natural scenery of Doon Valley and Loch Doon, which includes many impressive views, walks, and cycle paths. The Doon Valley area is also recognised as a site of special scientific interest due to its biodiversity. Another nearby attraction is the Dark Skies Observatory, which claims to have some of the darkest skies in the UK - perfect for stargazing. Due to the ancient history of the site, there are also many historical points of interest, such as a medieval Motte.

The Standing Stones of Dalmellington were erected in 1999 to act as a memorial to the seven mining villages of Doon Valley. Many of the coalfield communities in Scotland are caught between remembering their recent history, while also trying to create new identities and new futures.

The Standing Stones of Dalmellington





Key to the project were the two deliberative events and it was important that these community assemblies were designed in a way that would create a worthwhile and empowering experience for participants and facilitate authentic deliberation. It was also important that the events would produce the right sort of outputs and achieve the aims and objectives of the project, for both the organisers and the communities.

The basic structure of these events was based on a widely recognised deliberative framework. As these communities had recently finished or were coming to the end of their previous five year CRT facilitated Action Plan, it was important for community members to reflect on what had happened in recent years to see if community members agreed on whether the previous Action Plan, and the specific priorities and actions, had been completed successfully or not. Therefore, it was necessary to include an initial appraisal phase. Furthermore, CRT's Community Futures Programme includes a Participatory Budgeting event, in which community members vote on how to allocate funding to community project ideas. For this project there was an initial £20,000



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Participatory Budget for each community, as well as an opportunity to apply for greater financial support via the Scottish Government's Aspiring Communities Fund.

## **Reclaiming Our Coalfield Communities Deliberative Framework**

1. Appraisal Phase
2. Identifying Priorities Phase
3. Learning Phase
4. Ideas Phase
5. Decision Making / Participatory Budget Phase

## **Deliberative Democracy and Participatory Design**

Alongside this basic deliberative framework, it was recognised that the methods, tools and materials that were to be used within the events, along with the structure of the events themselves, could be designed in a way that would help to facilitate deliberation and document the discussions. It was also highlighted that these interactive tools and materials could improve the experience for both facilitators and participants by adding structure, value and creativity to the act of deliberation. To achieve this, ERS Scotland sought to draw from the creative methods and processes of participatory design.

Over the past few decades or so there has been an increasing convergence and coalescence between politics and design. Design has always been political; the act of making things in the world, or making certain things in certain ways, influences people's behaviour and can therefore be seen to be political. Nevertheless, the merging between the two supposedly separate fields has intensified in recent years. This is because, on the one hand, the scope of design has become

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increasingly broad and is now considered a way of thinking (design-thinking or innovation thinking) and is no longer limited to specific disciplines - of graphic designer, architect, fashion designer, for example.

On the other hand, political organisations are beginning to see the benefits that design methods and approaches can bring to political problems. The most notable example of this convergence in the UK is Policy Lab, established by the government in 2014, which is a design-led policy studio which brings “design thinking to Government”. There are similar government-initiated design studios in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, and many commercial design studios are also increasingly involved in projects which relate to the improvement of public services and policy. Rather than just focussing on the design of public services, however, there is scope to go even further and consider how we can redesign the democratic and political system itself to be fairer, more inclusive and deliberative.

The focus of deliberative democracy is to bring people together into a certain environment in which they can discuss, defend and define their political opinions with the aim of making informed and improved collective decisions. In a similar way, participatory design draws on the knowledge, creativity, skills and experience of people (or users) who will be affected by what is being designed, using creative methods and techniques to improve the quality and nature of design outputs, whether they be products, places, technologies, or public policies.

The values that underpin participatory design are increasingly being recognised as political rather than merely creative. There are many participatory processes, techniques, methods, skills, tools and tasks that have been tried and tested since the

emergence of participatory design in the 1960s. Therefore, there are many ideas which can be adopted or adapted for political and democratic purposes. What should our society be, if not the realisation of our democratic designs?

It is important to note that it is not to be expected that a specific participatory design process which works for one project or community will work for another. It is necessary that participatory processes are continually designed and re-designed to meet the needs and issues of that community. The same must be said of democracy. In order for politics to be truly democratic, it cannot remain a standardised public process. It must continually redesign itself to find meaningful, ethical and effective ways for people to design their own communities.



### The Performance of Politics

Politics is performative. Whether you are watching debates in the Houses of Commons, attending a political protest or taking part in community decision making, there is a theatre to politics that is integral to its nature. During the design phase, it was felt important to create a sense of ceremony and theatre at the deliberative events which would enhance the experience for participants.

To achieve this, Glasgow based artist Roos Dijkhuizen was commissioned to design and produce political banners which would be displayed during the events. Banners have a long history within politics, particularly when they have been used to unite working class communities and Trade Union members together under a common struggle. The idea of commissioning banners was even more relevant given that the three communities were ex-mining towns, which are steeped in working class trade union history.





The banners were also used to transform the event venues, changing the environment from one which was familiar to the community members to one which had an alternative and inspirational atmosphere that would encourage participants to think more creatively.

In order to design the banners, Roos Dijkhuizen travelled to each of the communities to gain an understanding of their common heritage and current situation. Dijkhuizen referenced photos of mining era protests, understanding the groups that gathered and the types of political banners that were traditionally used within these communities. Ancient Greek artefacts and symbols were also referenced, highlighting the origins of western democracy. Gestural representations - hands, eyes, ears and mouths - were also an important influence on the design, as the banners' ultimate aim was to commemorate the people present on the day of these local democratic events, symbolically reflecting back the expressions of the room, which are the human and physical articulations of democracy.

### **Recruitment**

One of the most challenging aspects of holding deliberative events is ensuring that, firstly, enough people attend, and secondly, that those who do attend do not just represent the interests of a narrow and small demographic. One of the main concerns with democracy today is that people feel as though the political system only represents the interests of an already powerful minority. It is therefore vital to deliberative democratic models that new forms of democracy should represent the interests of a cross section of society, whether that be at a community, municipal, regional or national level. This poses a problem for democracy as certain groups are traditionally more likely than

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others to engage with politics, particularly the more educated, wealthier and older demographics. How can we ensure that under-represented minorities, younger people, and people from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds get a say?

In order to address these challenges three Community Engagement Workers (CEW) were employed by CRT to publicise the events and garner support among existing groups, organisations, businesses and community members. The CEWs were people who had lived and worked in their communities, or nearby, and knew their communities well, and would therefore know how to approach people in order to recruit them.

Each CEW was given a demographic breakdown of their community that would be used to try and guarantee that the events were as representative as possible. In order to achieve this, people who signed up had to answer a number of questions on their age, gender, level of education, whether they lived in a household with children, and whether they lived in a household with someone who had a disability or a long term illness. The recruitment process was also broken up into two phases. Phase One was carried out over three weeks in December. It was then possible to look at who had signed up in order see where the demographic gaps were. The Second Phase then targeted these groups specifically.

A map of each of the communities was displayed in a public space - in a Post Office in Dalmellington, a cafe in Cardenden, and the library in Bo'ness - to promote the event, but also to engage with those who weren't able to attend. The posters provided a map of each community and asked them the question: What would you change about your community if it were up to you?

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Passers by were encouraged to write down their suggestions. This way the ideas, thoughts and concerns from others in the community could also be collected.

## **Community Engagement Workers**



*Adrian Maboney - Boness*

Adrian grew up in Bo'ness and has been a long time active member of the community. After studying journalism Adrian then worked for the Falkirk Herald for 10 years. Following this Adrian moved into public relations, working first in the government and then for a private consultancy. Since 1999 Adrian has run his own PR business. In 2007 he was elected to Falkirk Council, stepping down in 2017.



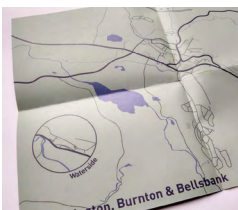
*Lorna Bett - Cardenden*

Lorna was born and brought up in a neighbouring village from Cardenden, called Ballingry. Lorna has a background in administration and more recently worked in the Scottish Parliament as a Parliamentary Organiser. Although not from Cardenden, Lorna is an activist in her own community and has a good knowledge of and association with lots of people from the area.



*Elaine Stewart - Dalmellington*

Elaine was born and bred in Dalmellington. She previously worked for a third sector organisation which provided play and recreation for young people living in a deprived area. Later Elaine worked as a local councillor before completing a degree in childhood practices. She currently runs a project that focuses on youth regeneration, employability and supporting other small social enterprises.

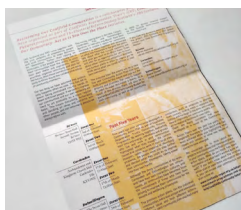


## Interactive Posters and Welcome Packs

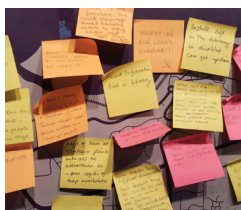
A map of each of the communities was displayed in a public space - in a Post Office in Dalmellington, a cafe in Cardenden, and the library in Bo'ness - to promote the event, but also to engage with those who weren't able to attend. The posters provided a map of each community and asked them the question: What would you change about your community if it were up to you? Passers by were encouraged to write down their suggestions. This way the ideas, thoughts and concerns from others in the community could also be collected.



Welcome Packs were designed that included a Letter of Invitation that formally invited sign-ups on behalf of ERS Scotland and CRT to attend the event; and an Information Leaflet that gave a bit of background to the events, a summary of deliberative democracy, as well as a breakdown of the day's activities. A map of the local area was included on the back of the information leaflet that could act as a poster that people could put up in their own homes.



Across the three communities the events were well attended, with around 40 people coming to Bo'ness and Cardenden, and over 50 to Dalmellington. Although there was a slight dip in attendance at the second event for each of the communities the numbers remained high and a majority of people came to both events. In terms of representation, the outcome was mixed. In all communities the turnout was proportionally older than average, particularly among the 45-65 year olds, and very few people who 16-19 or 20-24 signed up or attended on the day.



For educational attainment the results were proportionally higher for those with more qualifications, particularly for Dalmellington and Bo'ness. This is typical in political participation and unfortunately our recruitment process never

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reached the target of gathering a cross-section of society for either educational attainment or age. This could be due to a number of reasons, such as that it is easier to recruit those with more qualifications and older people because they are more likely to attend local community meetings and have more free time. Nevertheless, different methods should be tested to reach these politically underrepresented political groups.

The percentage of sign-ups with long term illness or disability in the family was about right for Bo'ness and Cardenden, and lower than average for Dalmellington. The number of people who signed up to the events that live in 'Households with Children' was on average lower. There is a tendency for those with family commitments to be unable to attend meetings due to care-giving and childcare responsibilities.

The recruitment process we tested was not a complete success as there was not a full cross-section of citizens at each of the events. Recruitment and participant retainment is often one of the most challenging - but most important - features for deliberative democracy. Even when Citizens' Assemblies are organised at the national level, with national funding and professional recruiters, gathering a cross-section of society together can be extremely difficult, as was the case in Ireland. If events such as these were institutionalised at a local level, consideration would need to be given to the recruitment process to ensure representation and legitimacy for the outcomes.



# Demographic Breakdown

## Dalmellington

Area	Population	Percentage
Dalmellington	1411	51%
Burton Bellsbank	1374	49%
Total	2785	100%

Age	16-19	20-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Dalmellington	75	145%	243	415	358
Burton Bellsbank	81	180%	239	378	204
Total	156	325%	483	793	562
Percentage	7%	14%	21%	34%	24%

Education	None	Standard Grades	Highers, Adv Highers	HNC, HND, etc	Degree
Dalmellington	553	333%	143	76	131
Burton Bellsbank	545	292%	122	50	73
Total	1098	625%	265	126	204
Percentage	47%	27%	11%	6%	9%

Disability	Does not have a disability or long term illness	Has disability or long term illness
Dalmellington	934	477%
Burton Bellsbank	947	427%
Total	1881	904%
Percentage	67.50%	33%

Households with Children	Families without children	Families with children
Dalmellington	407	144
Burton Bellsbank	397	184
Total	804	328
Percentage	71%	29%

## Bo'ness & Blackness

Area	Population
Bo'ness & Blackness	15098

Age	16-19	20-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Bo'ness & Blackness	625	1762	3225	4299	2545
Percentage	5%	14%	26%	35%	20%

Education	None	Standard Grades	Highers, Adv Highers	HNC, HND, etc	Degree
Bo'ness & Blackness	3855	3327	1680	1202	2393
Percentage	31%	27%	13%	10%	19%

Households with Children	Families without children	Families with children
Bo'ness & Blackness	2789	2287
Percentage	55%	45%

## Cardenden

Area	Population
Cardenden	5533

Age	16-19	20-29	30-44	45-64	65+
Cardenden	270	636	1135	1457	930
Percentage	6%	14%	26%	33%	21%

Education	None	Standard Grades	Highers, Adv Highers	HNC, HND, etc	Degree
Cardenden	1716	1275	516	440	481
Percentage	39%	29%	12%	9%	11%

Households with Children	Families without children	Families with children
Cardenden	923	734
Percentage	56%	44%

Disability	Does not have a disability or long term illness	Has disability or long term illness
Cardenden	4134	14
Percentage	75.00%	25%



The intention of the first event was to give participants time to reflect on what had recently been achieved in their communities, as well as focusing on what the current issues and concerns are. Each of the communities involved in this project had recently finished or was coming to the end of their previous five year Action Plan. Therefore, before we looked forward to the next five years, it was important to first look back and see if community members agreed on whether the previous Action Plan, and the specific priorities and actions, had been completed successfully or not.

## **Appraisal of the Past**

For The Appraisal of the Past task, the previous Community Action Plan was turned into a document where each individual action had a corresponding reference number (i.e. 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3, etc.). Each group was given a set of cards on which they would write down the actions reference number and a piece of string on which to attach the card, with the string representing a sliding scale of Successful to Unsuccessful.

Making the success of the action plan tangible and visual, so that participants could actively move

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the cards around, helped to facilitate discussion among participants around each individual action. This made sure that deliberation was focussed on the aims of the previous Action Plan rather than on other activities that have taken place in each of the communities.

Led by a facilitator, groups worked together to discuss whether specific actions had been achieved or not. The task also provided an opportunity to refresh people's memories about what had been laid out in the Action Plan five years ago, or perhaps learn about the successful - or unsuccessful - implementation of one of the community's actions.



### **Asset and Obstacle Mapping**

After appraising the past, the focus of the next task was to identify community assets and obstacles. The task was adapted from an asset mapping method which was developed by designers at Creative Citizens, a design-led political research body that was active between 2012 and 2015.

Groups were given red and yellow cards and allocated time to write down all their likes or assets in their community onto the yellow cards and all their dislikes or obstacles onto the red cards. Assets and obstacles could include anything from natural scenery, local history or derelict buildings, to local businesses, anti-social behaviour or roads and transport infrastructure.

Next, groups were asked to map these assets - both good and bad - onto a target. The centre of the target represented the assets which were most important to the community, with those that are less important placed towards the periphery. Related cards, whether they were positive or negative, were clustered together in order to generate themes. Through this task, workshop



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participants were able to prioritise what related issues and concerns are most important to them.

*‘The town has a lot going for it; a lot of volunteers, a lot of voluntary groups, but a lot of them don’t talk to each other and we’re all trying to achieve the same thing. So, I think an event like today certainly will bring a lot together for the benefit of the town.’*

Bo’ness participant, Event One

### **Themes and priorities**

The Asset Mapping exercise was used as a method to allow participants to deliberate on what the current issues and concerns were in their community and to begin to draw out - by clustering related cards together - new themes and priorities which would lay the basis for the next community Action Plan. To conclude the first workshop, groups were given worksheets on which to document these Themes and Priorities.

### **Event One Analysis**

The tools used for the first series of events were designed to stimulate discussion and document the themes, priorities and issues that were raised from the deliberative process. The next stage was to analyse this information and compile it together to create a unified picture of what the concerns were in each community. The analysis of the first event was documented in an Event One Report that was emailed to participants in advance of the Second Event, so that they were able to review the information.

### **Appraisal of the Past**

When analysing the Appraisal of the Past task, each group’s ‘washing line’, as they became affectionately called, was digitised and colour coded. Colour coding in this way meant that



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trends could be more easily identified, as seen in the examples on the previous page. For instance, in Bo'ness and Cardenden, it could be highlighted that most of the issues which were successful were all relatively 'easy'; they were mostly small, tangible, one-off measures, such as improving signposts, paths, or individual buildings. Another reason for this is that improvement in these areas can be more easily measured compared with longer-term developments related to the regeneration of infrastructure or expansion of the local economy. Although improvements may have been made in these areas, they are harder to identify and the communities were not aware of any improvements.

Through analysing this task, it was highlighted that many of the actions which were unsuccessful were contingent upon one another. This meant that if the first measure had been unsuccessful, later actions would also be more likely to be unsuccessful. The most successful actions were distinct and not part of a more lengthy and complicated chain, perhaps indicating this is the best approach for future action.

It was also notable that, particularly in Cardenden and Dalmellington, there was a noted lack of agreement among the groups about which actions or themes were completed successfully or unsuccessfully. This was an unexpected result of the task, as it had been assumed that the community would be more or less in agreement as to whether certain Actions had been achieved or not. Although the causes of this are hard to identify, it was proposed that this may be due to a lack of communication within the communities or a lack of engagement with the original Action Plan and its execution. Lack of communication was highlighted as one of the major themes in Dalmellington, which supports this analysis and



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suggests that although Actions might have been completed, people were not aware because of a general lack of communication.

### **Asset & Obstacle Mapping**

The information gathered from the Asset & Obstacle Mapping exercise helped to identify and draw out what assets were seen to have a positive impact on the community and what obstacles seen to have a negative impact. The analysis process involved listing all the assets which had been identified in order to see which were seen to be most commonly talked about overall, from group to group, and which were more frequently placed closer to the centre of the Asset Map.

In order to distill this information and communicate it in an accessible way, the information was summarised into 3 groups of Assets and Obstacles. For instance in Cardenden, the top Asset was the Community Groups, such as the History Group and the Men's Health Group. Second was seen to be shared community facilities, and in Third was Events and Activities. In Dalmellington, the top three obstacles were seen to be the Closure of Services and Amenities, such as the museum, banks and library; the State of the Built Environment was second, and Communication was in third.

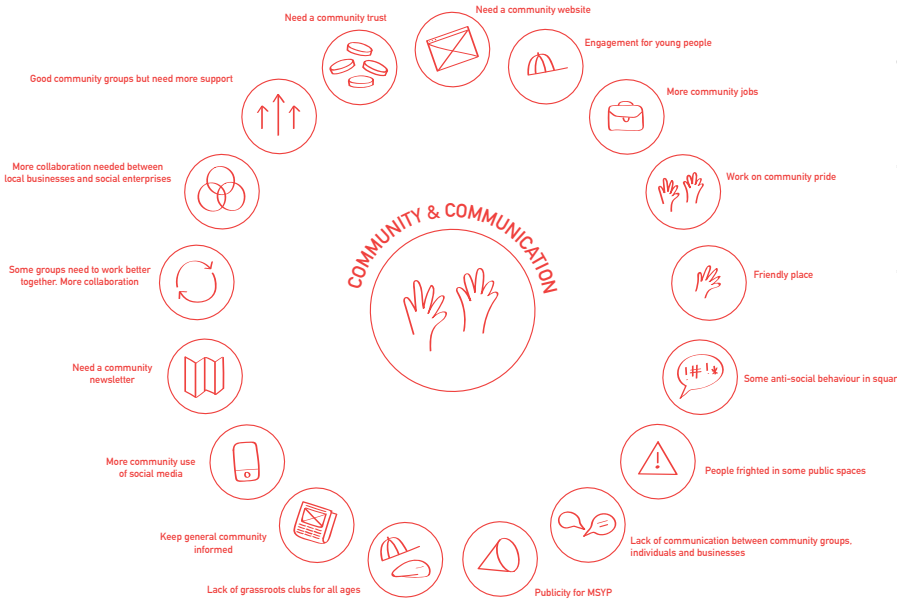
### **Themes and Priorities**

Within each community, the Asset & Obstacle Mapping exercise had been used to help community members to get everything out on the table and begin to prioritise what was most important.

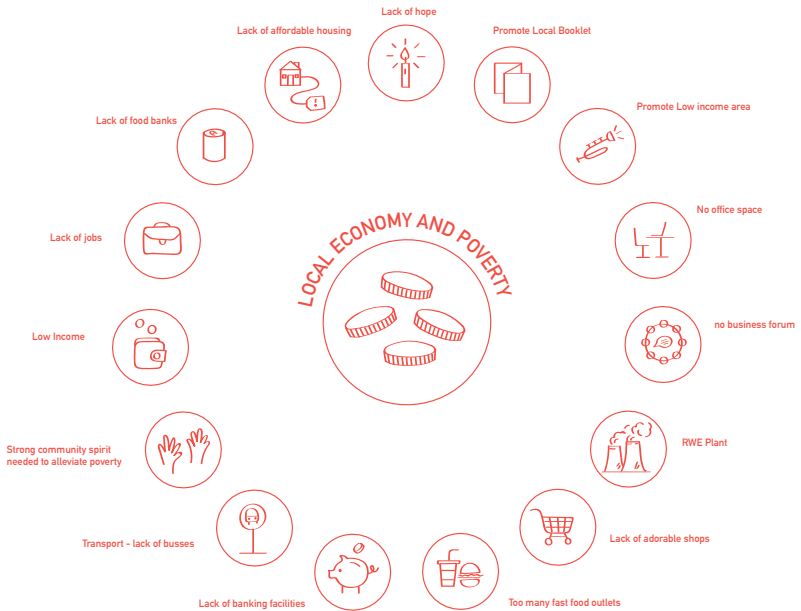
The Themes and Priorities worksheets documented the way in which each group clustered their assets and obstacles together. In order to make the themes more visual, illustrator Lizzie Abernethy created illustrations to summarise each

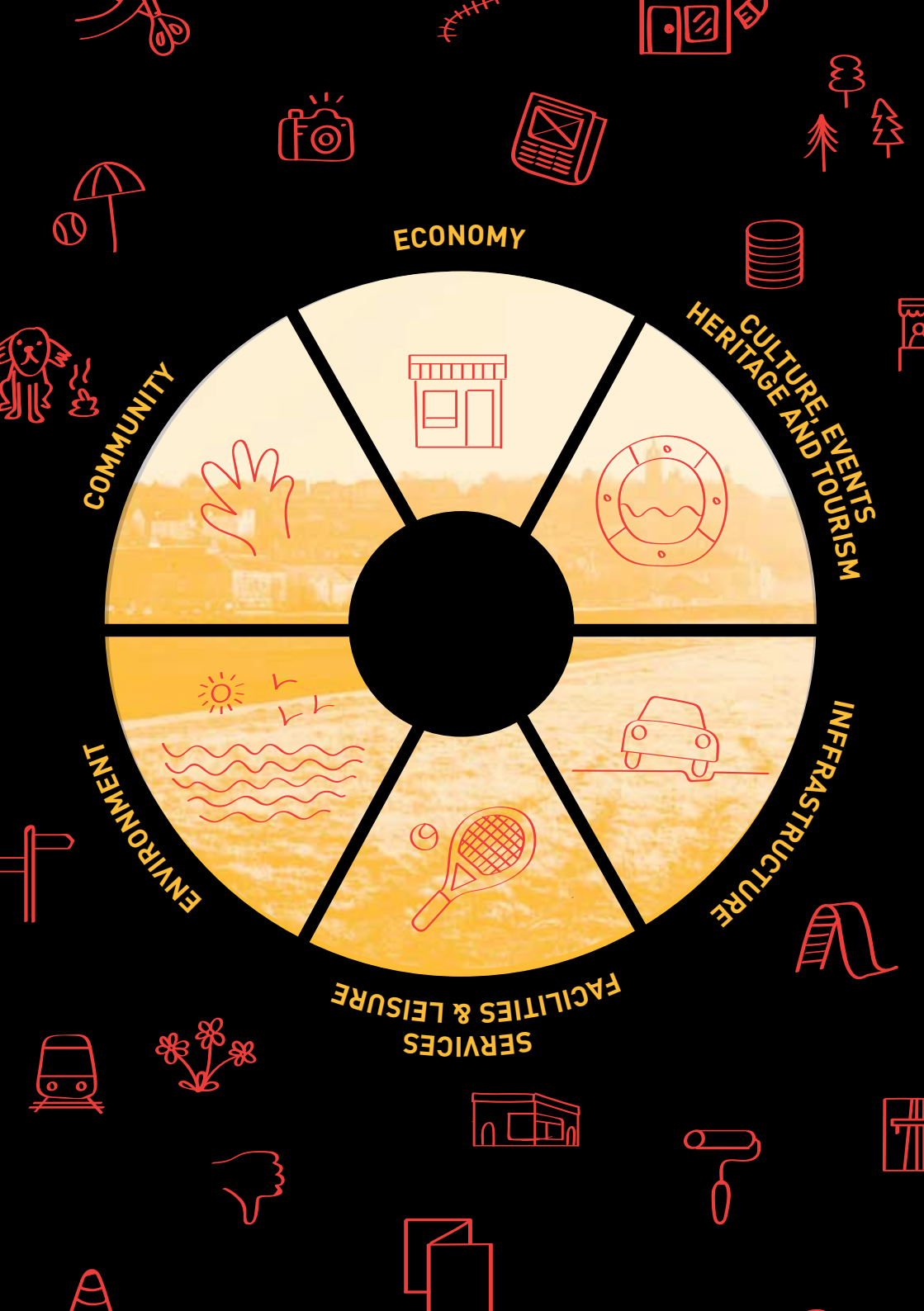


## Dalmellington themes & priorities example



## Cardenden themes & priorities example





ECONOMY



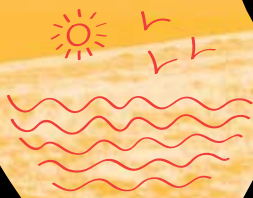
CULTURE EVENTS  
HERITAGE AND TOURISM



COMMUNITY



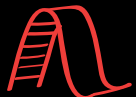
ENVIRONMENT



INFRASTRUCTURE



SERVICES & LEISURE





The second deliberative event took place a month after the first workshop. The primary aim of the second event was to develop project ideas and actions that would address the issues and concerns that had been highlighted at the first event.

## **Organising Priorities**

As some participants may not have come to the first event it was important to provide a space to go over Themes and Priorities that were developed in Event One.

All priorities that had been synthesised from Event One were turned into illustrated cards and on each table there was a traffic-light coding system. Groups went through the cards one by one and placed them on the corresponding colour depending on how easy or hard they thought each priority would be to address (Red = Hard, Amber = Medium, Green = Easy). The Organising Priorities task was designed to give participants time to overview the outcomes of the first event, but it also created an opportunity for participants to think about how much harder certain community issues are to tackle than others.

The chance to discuss priorities in this way



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allowed community members to think about what issues they could realistically tackle in the short to mid-term, and what are more systemic and embedded concerns that may require a concerted effort over a number of years.

### **Inspiring Projects**

An important phase that is key to deliberative democratic processes is a learning phase. Learning phases are usually included to inform the public of specific issues that they will have to debate and then decide on. These learning stages can happen in a number of different ways depending on the model of deliberative democracy and the issues in question.

For our deliberative events, the learning phase provided an opportunity to present projects, both locally in Scotland and further afield, that would inspire the communities to realise what they could achieve if they worked together and acted as if they owned the place.

It was important that those who were asked to speak could share projects that were relevant to the interests of each community and would provide valuable insight or information that would inspire those attending to think creatively about the future of their spaces and places.

The talks ranged from how to utilise local assets to attract tourism and boost the local economy, to considering the improvement of local democracy as a project in itself and not just a means to an end. Speakers across the three events included Chris Strachan from The Glasgow Tool Library and ERS Scotland; Abigale Neate-Wilson from The Glasgow Tool Library and Agile City CIC; Mike McCarron from GalGael; and Enid Trevett from Coalfields Regeneration Trust.



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## Projects and Actions

The last task of Event Two was focused on developing community projects and plans for how to achieve them, which would be broken down into tangible actions. For this phase, tables were split into smaller groups and each team were given Concept Worksheets that would lead participants towards well-structured project ideas.

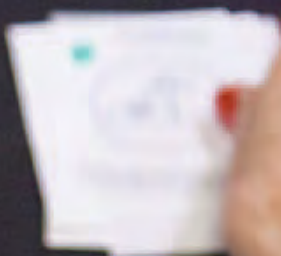
Initially, participants were asked to rephrase the issues they were focusing on into questions using the prefix “How might our community...” This process, adapted from the technique developed by design studio IDEO, of rephrasing issues into questions can turn challenges into opportunities. As IDEO state, rephrasing issues in this way “suggests that a solution is possible”. Framing the issue with “How might our community...” also helps to prioritise the public or common good of the whole community, rather than the needs of a particular group or demographic.

After rephrasing the issue, participants were then asked to answer the question by developing project ideas. Instead of focussing on developing one idea, the worksheet encouraged the small teams to think of three separate project ideas that would approach the issue from different perspectives. There were: 1, An easy option / short term thinking; 2, A hard option / long term thinking, and; 3, A radical alternative / something completely different. This format forced participants not just to think of the most obvious idea, but challenged them to think of other ways to tackle the issue.

Participants were then asked to either pick the best project concept or to combine elements of each in order to develop a final project idea. Groups completed the Concept Worksheets by answering a series of questions that would fill in some of the missing details. These questions

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included: Whose need is the action going to fulfil? Who's responsible for making it happen?; Where is the action going to take place?; and Does or could the project address any other community issues? Finally, groups were asked to develop a project timeline which would highlight the actions that would need to happen to bring the project to life.





Alongside the Action Plans themselves, Coalfields Regeneration Trust, through their Community Futures programme, provide £20,000 funding for each of the communities to be distributed through a Participatory Budget. During the course of the six months, individuals and groups from the communities were encouraged to submit applications for projects that needed small pots of funding. These could range from new kits for the local football team, to larger projects such as repairing the Town Hall roof or starting local growing initiatives. Although the participatory budget and the Action Plans were not directly linked, through the deliberative events ideas for projects emerged as the needs of the community were highlighted.

Participatory Budgets (PB) originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in an attempt to give citizens direct say in how public budgets are spent. In this context, PBs are used as a mechanism to give citizens democratic control over their communities. PBs are now used across the world, with many different forms and applications, but the process originally had a deliberative dimension. Citizens would come together to deliberate and



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establish priorities, and then decide how to distribute public resources and fund certain projects. In its original design a PB process gives citizens direct power over public funds. The £20,000 used for this project was not public money, but it did give citizens from the communities some control over how resources would be distributed. Due to the publicity of the events, in Cardenden the local council contributed an extra £10,000 to the participatory budget.

For the PB events, organised by Coalfields Regeneration Trust, applicants set up stalls showcasing their project. Members of the public attended and were able to find out information and ask questions. At the end of the event they then voted for the projects they wanted to receive financial support. For each of the communities, all of the projects received some funding and no one went home empty handed.



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## Funded Projects

### Bo'ness

1. Bon'ess Community Bus Service, Bo'ness Community Bus
2. Signage, Barony Theatre
3. Celebrating the Sea, Buzzness
4. Fun Lovin' Creatives, Firefly Design
5. Grow'ness, Sustainable Thinking Scotland CIC
6. Clean up Bo'ness Environment, Bo'net

### Cardenden

1. Cardenden Avenue Playpark, Cardenden Playpark Group
2. Youth Shelter, Cardenden Community Development
3. Gammie Place Upgrade, Environment Group
4. Coaching Skills, John Thomson Memorial
5. Poop yer Scoop, Cardenden Development Forum

### Dalmellington

1. Be-fit Family Fitness, Dalmellington Amateur Boxing Club
2. Bellsbank Summer Science Scheme, Cani in the Community
3. Disabled Access, Dalmellington Community
4. Life in Dalmellington WWI, Doon Valley History Group
5. Dalmellington Cycle Hub, Community Futures Group
6. Development Trust Launch and Website, Community Action Group

# Action Plans

The final output of this six month capacity building project was the three Five Year Community Action Plans. These Action Plans compiled the Themes, Priorities and Actions that had been developed through the deliberative events, along with a summary of the democratic process. The Themes and Priorities highlight the main strategies that were identified by the communities and created a blueprint community action. It is the responsibility of the community itself - its citizens and groups - working in collaboration with other organisations, individuals and institutions, to make change happen. The Priorities range from short-term targets, such as developing a local website or setting up a Development Trust, to much longer-term objectives, such as the repurposing of derelict buildings or attracting new businesses to the area.

Below is an example of one Theme and its associated Priorities that were developed for each of the communities.

## BO'NESS

### Economy and Transport

Priority	Action
Tackle empty shops	Work with Falkirk Council and Business Gateway to encourage small businesses and individuals to set up businesses in these properties
Make better use of underused buildings	Establish patterns of current use Market and promote these spaces
Develop proposals for further improvement to the town centre	Explore and develop plans for street art, floral enhancements, creating a café culture
Create storage for wheelie bins	Identify suitable sites Work with Falkirk Council to create safe and secure storage areas
Attract new businesses	Encourage small manufacturing and service businesses to set up locally
Potential partners	Falkirk Council, Buzzness, Bo'net, Bo'ness Community Council, Business Gateway, local businesses



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## CARDENDEN

### Infrastructure and Local Services

Priority	Action
Need for improved transport	Work with local businesses on mobility access and local bus group
Need for improved mobility access	Identify where the issues are and work with local businesses to improve mobility access
Lack of doctors, especially specialist doctors and long waiting times	Liaise with Local MSPs and MPs to lobby the Scottish Government
Lack of car parking	Work with Fife Council to identify areas in the villages where more designated parking is required. Identify areas of neglected land that could be redeveloped as car parks for local residents. Work with Fife Council to develop an exemplar community project which addresses parking and traffic management issues.
No facilities at weekends for young people	Work with young people to ascertain their needs Work with Fife Council Community Learning and Development Team
Lack of affordable and quality housing	Work with social housing providers to ascertain how further developments can be provided

## DALMELLINGTON

### Community Facilities, Events, Services and Amenities

Priority	Action
Creation of Development trust	Encourage the community to form a Development Trust
Public toilets	Development Trust to find funding for public toilets
Upgrade community facilities including asset transfers	Community groups are encouraged to provide quality facilities for local community to enjoy
Lack of accommodation & places to eat	Work with local business and groups to develop more B&B
Develop community bank	Create a focus group to take this idea forward
Youth services in Bellsbank & more weekend services	Develop junior and senior youth clubs in Bellsbank
Development of community website, Doon Valley Gazette and notice boards	Work with the action groups to develop a community website, publication of local gazette and better usage of notice boards.
Provide more fitness, health and wellbeing activities for all ages	Work with Doon Valley ABC to develop better facilities and more activities for the whole community including family and people suffering from a variety of illnesses that can be tackled through fitness & wellbeing activities.
Potential Partners	CANI in the Community, Vibrant Communities EAC , The Zone Initiative Ltd, Dalmellington Community Action Group, Doon Valley ABC, Local Business, Dalmellington Community Association, Local Individuals and Groups, Visit Scotland, East Ayrshire Carers



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# Democracy 21 & Declaration on Local Democracy

After exploring what democracy should look like at the community level, the next step was to develop a vision for local democracy across Scotland that works for all of us and gives everyone the ability to shape the places where they live.

Democracy 21 was a national conference organised by ERS Scotland on behalf of the Our Democracy coalition. The event was held at the Marriott Hotel, in Glasgow on 23rd June 2018, and brought people together to discuss the future of Scottish democracy, with the overriding question being: how do we make a democracy that is fit for the 21st century?

Key speakers included Dorren Grove, Head of the Open Government Partnership, Paul Mason, journalist; Linda Somerville, NUS Scotland; Lesley Riddoch, Broadcaster; Kyle Taylor, Fair Vote; Darren 'Loki' McGarvey, author and rapper; and many more. Some of the themes covered during the day included: Technology And Democracy: After Cambridge Analytica, how can we make it work?; Imagining Institutions: A Vision For New Democratic Infrastructure; The Collapse In Trust: People, Politicians and Parliaments, among many others. Throughout all of these discursive topics,

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one of the key concerns was: how do we take power back for communities?

The impetus for Democracy 21 is that the future of democracy is under threat. There are many ways that democracies need to be improved, but it will be impossible to keep our democracies alive if we don't look at how we can reform them, revive them and make them better. We need to improve the quality of our democratic institutions, improve our abilities as citizens to deliberate on important issues and reach consensual agreements, and improve our communities through active participation.

Democracy 21, through plenary speakers and breakout discussion workshops, explored ways to improve Scottish democracy in relation to issues such as technology, populism, capitalism, and centralisation. Importantly, Democracy 21 also marked the launch of the Our Democracy coalitions Declaration on Local Democracy. The Declaration was developed directly from the Impact Our Democracy participatory event and workshop, held in Edinburgh in April 2018. It also marks two years of work bringing communities together to look at how we can build a local democracy for 21st century Scotland.

This declaration was launched amid growing concerns that power is being increasingly centralised in Holyrood (and Westminster). It has also been launched to coincide with the Scottish Government's consultation on Local Governance, taking place throughout 2018. This declaration calls on the Government's reforms to go as far as possible. It calls for councils to be brought closer to communities, while increasing the role citizens have in decision-making by embedding community planning, participatory budgeting and Citizens' Assemblies at the local level.

If democracy is not only survive the 21st century,

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but thrive, then local democratic reform alone is not going to be the only remedy. But it is an important one. As highlighted in the introduction, the level of representation at the local level in Scotland is one of the worst in Europe. We need to fix this if we have any hope of creating “a truly local democracy, a truly participatory democracy and a truly powerful democracy”.

### **Declaration on Local Democracy**

Democracy is the right for people to decide how the place where they live is run. For a hundred years this right has built our communities, our society and our sense of justice. But too few people now believe that this right is being honoured, too few believe that they decide and too many believe they are powerless and voiceless. So we call for a new democracy which is ready to help us build for a hundred years to come.

First, decisions must be made for each place, in that place by the people who live there. Our towns and villages must decide for themselves just as our nation must decide for itself. Power must exist at the scale of the community which is affected. We need our democracy much closer.

Second, the right to decide should not disappear each time the brief flicker of an election is over. Delegating our right to decide is not, in itself, enough. We must create a democracy that involves us all the time, where citizens do not just choose rulers but shape the rules.

Third, democracy must be powerful. The right to choose must be matched by the power to do – and the power to do must be matched with the resource to do it. Democracy is not gifted from above but from below, so power and resource must rest in the places where people live.

This is our simple vision for our future: a truly local democracy, a truly participatory democracy

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and a truly powerful democracy.

We have learned the lesson of our last hundred years; it is not enough that the future is built, it must be built for us. We must now learn a lesson for our next hundred years; it is not enough that the future is built for us, it must be built by us.







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# Conclusion

It is clear that community level democracy needs to be improved in Scotland and it is a cause for optimism that the Government is currently carrying out a review of Local Governance. It is important that this review leads to policy reform that not only brings Scotland up to the democratic standards that are common throughout Europe; it must seek to improve upon these standards, solidifying democratic values and principles through radical institutional reform. Only by doing this will democracy be able to defend itself against a myriad of threats and become fit for the 21st century.

One of the most important reforms is that people need to be able to make decisions about the places where they live. During the Brexit campaign, one of the main calls for Brexit was that it provided an opportunity for people to ‘take back control’. The same argument was used for Scottish Independence. Yet, how much control will people actually have if the political system we engage with is still designed on extremely hierarchical and centralised structures. These demands to ‘take back control’ stem from a general lack of control that arises due to alienation from our current

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political system. Power needs to be exercised closer to the places it impacts.

We at ERS Scotland believe that a more deliberative and localised democracy is necessary for a revitalised democracy. This will not solve all the problems or combat all the threats, but it would be an important first step. Of course, radical reform such as this would take time to implement. People are not used to behaving as active citizens, deliberating in public forums and exercising democratic decision-making powers. However, this book has shown that with the right processes and recruitment methods, people will come out and 'act as if they own the place'. In fact, the turnout at these events is a source of optimism as it highlights that many people want to take an active interest in their communities but lack the formal institutional structures to do so.

For each of the communities these deliberative events only marked the start of the five year journey; a journey which they are now a year into. Our premise had been that bringing people together to talk about their issues and aspirations would help to galvanise community action, creating a shared sense of ownership over the process and outcomes. Speaking to one of the Community Engagement Workers, they highlighted that compared to the previous community action planning process, which focussed more on passive surveys, the deliberative approach proved to be '*a more modern...easy and fun way to engage local communities.*'

The communities are now at different stages of carrying out their Action Plans and one of the main takeaways from this project is ensuring that there are people in place to take responsibility for the Action Plan after the planning process. In Dalmellington, the Community Engagement Worker Elaine was able to put her energy into

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delivering on the action plan and supporting the projects. In only six months, due in large part to her involvement, Dalmellington was able to use the Action Plan to gain £309,400 in funding to support local projects, that included setting up local youth clubs, creating family fit sessions at the local boxing club, putting in place a Development Trust, installing disabled ramps, and designing new leaflets and signage in the area. An amazing achievement.

In the other two communities there has not been the same level of success, but a number of projects are underway or even complete. There are many reasons for this, such as a lack of community capacity and a loss of momentum due to delays in launching the action plans. Most importantly, there needs to be an individual or preferably a group in place before the launch of the action plan who can take responsibility for carrying out the actions, keeping people up to date with its progress or delegating responsibility to others where necessary.

More experimentation in local democracy needs to be encouraged, exploring how deliberative forums could be institutionalised across the country. This project did not uncover the perfect model and it is unlikely that democracy ever will be perfect. There is definitely room for improvement, particularly in recruitment and representation when this is so important for legitimacy. There is also scope to design the events differently to see how this changes the types of aspirations people have - whether they are more innovative and creative, or practical and procedural. Nevertheless, this project did provide an opportunity for a collaborative experiment in deliberative and creative politics that could breath new life into our democratic system.

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# Credits

Publication written and edited by Chris Strachan

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