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Why Regenerate?

Let's say you want the place where you live to both look better and operate more effectively for the benefit of its residents and its businesses.

Do you think you know all the local issues and all the answers for a better future for your area? Sometimes we do – but let's double-check the 'why' of what we're thinking about before we get bogged down in the detail of the 'what' and the 'how'.

We should look at local aspirations, local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis), and collect solid evidence to back it all up, as potential funders will want to know that we've covered the detail.

Energetic activists may not want to go to this level of detail and prefer to rush straight ahead to plan their regeneration campaign – with maybe more action than planning. I suggest we should spend the time to make sure that what we do will be long-lasting before we spend resources badly, and even if we fast forward from Chapter 1 to Chapter 8, use the other chapters for reference.

The other major benefit of coming up with a clear 'why' – perhaps expressed in a few words as a 'mission statement' – is that it will help keep you focused. Once you start a regeneration campaign, and in particular once you start being successful, all kinds of people will come to you with suggestions for new projects. In order to keep focused on the best use of your time, a clear 'why' will help you identify which projects are for you, and which – short of a bit of publicity support – should be managed by somebody else.

What's It All About?

We know regeneration is a change process, but each place will have its own ideas about what to change into.

Research in Gloucester city centre in 2005 suggested that 50% of people equated regeneration with physical change – building new buildings, improving old buildings.

Another 25% felt the most important thing was to involve local people and businesses in decisions about the future – it was the *way* it was done which was key.

The rest of the survey replies were more detailed, very particular comments of different kinds, reflecting individual concerns.

Is this how it is in your area?

We need to find out what local people think is important, as whatever we do, we will be more successful if we carry the whole community with us.

Depending on the size of our community, a couple of open days (one in working hours, one not) at fully accessible venues where people can look at new and old photographs and ask questions is good, and any survey forms should also be made available electronically for busy or housebound computerate people.

Hard copy surveys can be expensive for a large community, but may be handy if you can get volunteers to deliver them as not everyone uses computers. We devised a simple street survey in the summer of 2011 when we were gathering ideas to inform a parish plan for Mitcheldean in the Forest of Dean. We just asked three questions:

- What do you like about Mitcheldean?

- What don't you like?

- What could be improved?

The feedback from this and from additional comments at a public event formed the basis for a detailed questionnaire that went round all local households and businesses, and the results formed the basis for the final plan.

Parish plan exhibition in Mitcheldean community centre August 2011

Local Identity

What is so special about the place considering regeneration?

- Its location?

- Its history and culture?

- Its raw material and industries?

I could say its people, but that goes without saying – and they need to be involved in these discussions anyway.

Don't pick a future that doesn't make sense locally – not everywhere can be a major shopping centre, for example. The city council in Birmingham based their regeneration plans on the city's handy location in the middle of England, with good transport routes, and it became the site for the National Indoor Arena. They also undid the isolation of the city centre caused by 1960s ring roads for the mighty motor car.

There is a 'Transition movement' view that every place should be replanning its future anyway, as so many past assumptions about things like financial markets, climate and the availability of resources now need to give way to greater local resilience. So the way forward may not be the mixture as before – though something that worked locally 50 or 150 years ago should be discussed rather than dismissed out of hand, as at least it worked once!

Get local people and organisations together, and carry out a SWOT analysis (list strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) for the local area. Then put together statistical figures for the identified issues to create a 'baseline', so that you can measure progress over time. Success can then be judged on whether the measured figures are going up (e.g. employment) or down (e.g. crime) as appropriate.

Is there a regional context? Look at other similar places, spend some time on picking a direction, and then work at 'place making' together. Involving local people in determining local identity and what the future should look like is absolutely crucial. I firmly believe that most local issues, even if they seem to be subject to national policy, can only be really dealt with at a local level where the detail is known, rather than having solutions imposed on a community from above.

SWOT Analysis

This is a well-established process for setting the parameters for your local regeneration scheme, for example:

- Strengths – such as the value of your location for business, skills levels of local people, local amenities such as sporting facilities, strong local heritage

- Weaknesses – declining industries, high levels of unemployment and crime, low levels of health and wealth

- Opportunities – sites available for redevelopment or a new local market, government grant schemes, developer interest

- Threats – environmental issues like rising flood levels

Some issues you may find cropping up under more than one heading, such as a good road network providing economic opportunities but environmental

threats. This is fine – a bit of perspective helps produce a balanced plan for the way ahead. And a clear SWOT analysis can help if you are ever faced with the dilemma of trading off one aspect of sustainability against another.

Evidence Base

You will need to find some clear facts and measures to fill out your SWOT analysis, such as:

- Local population – numbers, ages, genders, ethnicity, health and lifestyle issues

- Local businesses – types, numbers employed

- Local employment levels, including those who commute to work

- Local landowners (particularly of sites that need a new future)

Much of this detail can be found either through the Internet or by taking advice from local government sources.

We know quite a lot about regeneration now, and have access to local, regional, national and international statistics and UK good practice, for example:

- *Learning the Lessons from the Estates Renewal Challenge Fund* (Pawson et al., 2005)

- *The Single Regeneration Budget: Final Evaluation* (Rhodes et al., 2007)

- *Final Report on the New Deal for Communities Programme* (Batty et al., 2010)

Such reports along with properly charted local views, resources and aspirations will give us a much more solid basis for going forward.

> The angel is in the detail.
>
> Actually, there's only one job in regeneration, which is effectively marshalling all the detail and then applying it in the right place and in the right way with the right people.
>
> You heard it first here.

Outputs and Outcomes

What exactly are you trying to achieve? Measurable targets are very necessary to help focus a regeneration programme, but adopt them carefully, they're better as a skeleton than a straitjacket:

- **Mission statement** – a one-phrase summary of what you're trying to achieve, such as 'Reduce local crime and the fear of crime'

- **Outputs** – things you can number, such as new community safety publications, and new closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in place

- **Outcomes** – the result of your activities, such as less fear of crime measured through public surveys

- **Indirect outcomes** – things that happen as a side-effect of your activity, such as reduced insurance premiums in previously high-crime areas

- **Performance indicators** – measures that show progress towards a particular objective, such as reductions in the number of burglaries over time

- **Milestones** – can seem like outputs, but are really stage markers in a project or process, such as local shops signing up to participation in a crime reduction campaign

In the UK a number of measures have been grouped into the 'English Indices of Deprivation' which are re-measured every three years (see Appendix 1). Bringing areas out of 'deprivation' (horrible word) is therefore a common regeneration target, though finding some generic positive measures would be good, and some of us are working on that.

Before UK government funding was cut, there was what I call a 'percentage rugby' (concentrating on the parts of the game likely to produce the best result) approach to regeneration in the UK, focusing on the 70% of issues around finance, skills qualifications, jobs and new buildings. A lot of UK regeneration funding has been predicated on economic outputs such as new jobs, training courses and workspaces, but this reflects a received view that these are the most important things – which are happily measurable!

There are other things as important to community life, some of them spiritual, and not everyone in the community will put 'jobs' at the top of their list

anyway (don't assume – ask them). So take any public funding by all means, but balance the official outputs with more local outcomes. Let's not marginalise what the community want for themselves – people do not live by bread alone – and let's go for the whole lot. If we don't, I strongly suggest we're admitting a degree of failure even before we start.

Poverty

Jesus said 'The poor are always with you'. He never thought this would be underwritten by the UK government, who have since defined poverty in the UK as any family earning less than 60% of mean national income. So there'll always be someone in the UK who's officially poor.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's definition of poverty is 'when a person's resources are not enough to meet their basic needs'. This UK-based charity and research organisation has expanded on this statement to say:

Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can overwhelm people, affecting them emotionally and depriving them of the chance to play a full part in society.

The reality is, almost anyone can experience poverty. Unexpected events such as bereavement, illness, redundancy or relationship breakdown are sometimes all it can take to push us into circumstances that then become difficult to escape.

(Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016: 4)

The Foundation has carried out four years of research and in 2016 produced a strategy entitled *We Can Solve Poverty in the UK* (see Bibliography). In summary:

Our five-point plan to solve poverty in the UK will:

- Boost incomes and reduce costs;
- Deliver an effective benefit system;
- Improve education standards and raise skills;
- Strengthen families and communities; and
- Promote long-term economic growth benefiting everyone.

Bringing together the skills and resources of national and local governments, businesses, service providers and citizens, we want to solve poverty in the UK within a generation. Our vision is to make the UK fit for the children starting school this year – so that by the time they enter adulthood in 2030, they will be living in a UK where:

- No one is ever destitute;

- Less than one in ten of the population are in poverty at any one time; and

- Nobody is in poverty for more than two years.

(Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016: 5)

We can see from this that the Foundation also expect poverty to be a permanent local feature, but are proposing permanent ways to address it. These include actions that can be addressed locally:

- Improving people's skills and education

- Getting them into work that pays

- Reducing prices for essential goods and services (including housing)

- Unlocking the full human capital available

Many of the recommendations in the report focus on government-level action around support and social benefits, but the strategy also says, 'Galvanise community-led approaches and social action to build pressure for change'. I won't steal all the report's thunder here, but as we are clear there are poverty issues everywhere, then addressing poverty has to be one of the big concerns of a regeneration worker.

On the same topic, child poverty has been described as young people growing up in poor households. I mention child poverty because it's an inflammatory phrase, and can focus public attention on short-term relief for poorer children rather than the longer-term issue of what they and their families need to help get sustainable (probably work-based) income that will help lift them out of poverty forever. Child poverty is adult poverty too.

I make this point not to object to help for poor children, which of course is important, but as another word of warning before we rush into the 'what' and 'how'. You may have an idea of what you want to achieve in regeneration, but take time to check out the long-term impacts of what you're doing, don't just leap into the first idea that occurs that seems to make sense. Lasting long-term regeneration is the real prize.

Cycles of Deprivation

Some of the regeneration issues you may be trying to address will have been embedded for a long time, particularly in large housing estates in ex-industrial

areas where three generations of the same family may be out of work. Such situations have been somewhat unhappily dubbed 'cycles of deprivation', though there are probably several cycles that need to be understood together:

- **Individual** – e.g. personal disappointment leading to lack of enthusiasm, leading in turn to indifferent response to new opportunities, thus increasing the chances of further disappointment; also the risk of poorer health through depression and lack of activity

- **Generational** – i.e. poor conditions in parents' lives that increase the risk of poor outcomes for their children

- **Neighbourhood** – i.e. wider sociological, economic and physical factors linked to the location

We carried out some work on this in Oxfordshire in 2010, looking at areas like Blackbird Leys, which is still suffering from the closure of the nearby Cowley motor works in the 1970s. Change in such areas will not come quickly, but we came to the following conclusions drawn from the evidence of past schemes and studies:

- 'Business as usual' is not sufficient to break deprivation

- Public services can and do improve prospects for individual families, but for the overall 'deprivation scores' of an area to change, it must also become a place where people want to work and live

- A real prospect of a better life helps people to want to develop their futures in an area

- In areas of high 'deprivation', this almost certainly means one or more radical changes to the area and to its long-term opportunities, including links to the wider economy

- All the evidence suggests that including local people in determining and delivering these changes is vital for their success

- Focusing all local agencies' efforts is also vital

- The process will take more than the five or ten years of previous schemes

At the risk of leaping ahead, this was our proposed template for breaking cycles of deprivation, which you might want to compare to the picture in your own area:

A place to work

- A variety of real opportunities for sustainable employment, greater than the number of local people needing work, and either provided locally or through travel to work

- Clear career routes to this employment, including information from employers about vacancies, access to the necessary foundation and vocational skills

training, and planning and other policies to ensure local residents are given suitable priority

• Good access to adequate services to address any barriers to employment, including health services, childcare and debt counselling

A place to live

• Good quality mixed housing, affordable for all income levels, and set in a well-managed environment

• Good access to amenities, including shops, health centres and leisure facilities

• Good community cohesion and community safety, including vibrant community activities and local governance, with low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour

World View

I said at the start of this book that you will need a strong world view to support you in the regeneration jungle.

We'll hear more about the jungle later, but when dealing with a lot of complex issues with a large number of people, you can imagine that you will be glad of some touchstone or certainty of your own that you go back to when times get tough.

You may already have such a touchstone, but whether or not you do, try these three questions about the world you are seeking to change:

• How does it work?

• Who's really in charge of which bit?

• What matters for the future?

Having answers to these questions will help you to work out how to get to where you want to be. But remember, others on the same journey may have different answers to these questions, so check their world views also as you meet them along the way.

And do keep your own world view under review as you go. More information will inevitably become available.

Case Study: Staunton Parish Plan – SWOT Analysis

This is an example of a SWOT analysis carried out by local people when developing the 2007–2010 parish plan for Staunton in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire. An initial meeting was held in May 2006 with the support of the parish council to gauge the interest of residents in developing a plan.

The meeting included a SWOT analysis, and a steering group was subsequently formed.

It is interesting to see tourism identified as a threat as well as an opportunity – a common view in many attractive rural places – also they seem to have used STOW not SWOT. The definition given in the extract below explains the approach, though many of the opportunities are strictly speaking project ideas and community desires rather than, for example, the genuine tourism opportunities provided by the area for walkers and cyclists.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Strengths are the things which we are good at or are unique to our parish, such as an active community willing to help itself. We use our Strengths to overcome Weaknesses.

Opportunities are the things which either present themselves or are instigated by us to improve parish life. Threats are things which we may face now or those that a changing society presents such as burglaries or vandalism.

The following table was developed at our public meeting from parishioners and is recorded in order to capture those hopes and fears expressed there. It will serve as a guide to help us exploit our strengths and opportunities and better equip us to deal with weaknesses and threats.

Table 1.1   Staunton Parish Plan SWOT analysis

Strengths	Threats
The forest	Speed of traffic on A4136
Wild animals	Amount of heavy traffic on A4136
The scenery – beautiful landscape and good location	No crossing to link village across A4136
Quiet village life	Stowfield Quarry – the size – its expansion, the noise and pollution – worries about the explosions – worries regarding village houses
The village hall	
The Meend	Crime and vandalism
Active parish council for small parish	Rubbish
Local footpaths	Overgrown footpaths
Small population	Ageing population
Play area for children	Increasing house prices
Local community groups and clubs	Wild boar
Parish history	Apathy
Community spirit	Knotweed
Village pub	Dilapidated road surfaces
Active social groups	Closure of Church
Pleasant place to live	Sewerage
History	Tourism (also an opportunity)

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Opportunities	Weaknesses
More clubs/activities	Division of village by road
Restore the Meend and stone walls	Lack of public transport
Tourism (also a threat)	Poor police street/Meend cover
Development of B&Bs	Limited facilities for young/elderly
Walking, cycling	Lack of local employment
Horse riding	Traffic speed and noise
Locally produced goods – village market	Inadequate car parking facilities
Plant more flowers	Poor communication especially for those new to village
Better signage	
Maps available for disabled and able bodied	New householders not participating in village community life
Pelican crossing	
Construction of village hall car park	

Source: Staunton Parish Council (2007: 15–16)

Further Reading

Burwood, Simon and Roberts, Peter (2002) *Learning From Experience*. BURA (British Urban Regeneration Association, now sadly no more) – the first publication I think that attempted to collate good regeneration practice in the UK – for example, 'The most successful schemes are those that address a range of issues by utilising a multi-dimensional approach to regeneration'. As a regeneration worker you will develop a matrix in your head of how modern life is managed, and by which agencies, to match against whatever issue comes up.

Independent Commission on Health Equalities in Oxfordshire (2016) *Headline Report: Addressing Health Inequalities in Oxfordshire*. National Health Service – one of a number of initiatives you can read up on, this one further developing the thinking in Oxfordshire around the impact of poverty – downloadable from http://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/sites/default/files/health_inequalities_head line_report.pdf (Accessed 14 June 2017).