

## SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE FROM NEILSTON DEVELOPMENT TRUST

*Firstly, can you tell us the pressures you now face as a result of the economic downturn and cut in local government funding?*

1. Our organisation has suffered from a chronic lack of funding for its core functions and has depended on unpaid staff (strictly volunteers but acting as members of the management team) since inception. Our pressures have been over-reliance on the skills of these individuals, with the consequent imbalance in the growth of the organisation's capacity (governance, finances etc.) as it moved from one ground-breaking initiative to another, (e.g. asset acquisition under the Land Reform Act, and its development, then partnering in a unique windfarm development).
2. So the downturn has had little direct effect at that level. However competition for grants from government trusts etc. is fierce as charities and third sector bodies compete for a smaller pot of funds. Quite simply, if government wishes trust an other such organisations to deliver on the range of outcomes which it - and the sector - wishes to see delivered, there has to be investment in emerging organisations to allow them to take off. The achievements of Neilston and other such places are not replicable on the basis of the voluntary input required. That is not to argue for the overnight professionalization of the movement. But a balance must be struck, or the movement will weaken after the first wave of founding enthusiasts move on.
3. The downturn has meant that in a place like Neilston, people have less money in their pockets to support some of our activities, e.g. a series of first-rate concerts in the village attracting international artists. At a more basic level, pressures on the budgets of the people whom we most want to reach will mean that even the modest charges we make in the café or for children's events will not be affordable, thus reducing our income but, more significantly, excluding the very residents who need the support and social outlet that the Trust offers. Our tenants in the Bank (e.g. holistic therapies) may also have to withdraw as their customer base reduces.
4. We do not receive regular financial support from our local authority, and the council grants and budgets for projects in which the Trust has and might have participated as a partner are obviously constrained.

*Can you also provide us with examples of capital spend that has been used to reduce revenue costs?*

5. Our community owned asset, the Bank, has undergone full refurbishment, supported by capital (£589,000) and revenue funds (£195,000) from a total of 11 funders, led by Big Lottery. The running costs of the property pre-refurbishment were crippling and the super-insulated building with solar and biomass heating should see this reduce (although the building is now in much more intensive use so direct comparison is difficult to make).

*Secondly, can you tell us what causes levels of community participation to increase and decrease?*

6. This is hard to answer. Our participation levels are on a steady increase, thanks to our new shop window, the Bank, the consolidation of volunteering, the attractiveness of our activities (cycling, walking, food, gardening, heritage, music) and, most important, the interaction of people coming together and forging new formal and informal networks - the social capital dimension.
7. It is this, rather than the use of specific techniques that stimulates a feeling of identification and trust. A widow who comes on a walk ends up volunteering in the café, a café volunteer joins the singing group, an office volunteer enlists as a cycling trainer... and so on. Working with others on something that interests you is the simple recipe. For those who have worked in such situations, seeing the confidence and joy that comes from this growth is the touchstone of success. Investment in the identification and nurturing of these human assets would be the single most important piece of progress I would like to see.
8. 'Cultural work' - what we have tried to do in Neilston - may in fact turn out to be 'community capacity building'. For me, it feels like the starting point is different, more human, but that may be a matter of taste in terminology. What remains is the need for commitment to work, slowly over time, with no predetermined outputs and outcomes, to understand what works, to respond and to gently grow individuals' confidence to contribute to the life of their place. The argument for this may be hard to make as against that for a specific service or initiative, but in Neilston our achievement would be hugely reduced had we not had the almost totally unpaid input of our cultural coordinator for the past 7 years.

*Can you also tell us how community capacity training is being carried out?*

9. We have currently no formal training in place, but internally attempt to inform our work by the Scottish Standards for Community Engagement. We are about to engage with the Community Planning Partnership team in building wider citizen engagement in the Neilston Town Charter programme.

*And third and finally, we would be grateful if you were able to provide us with the percentages of men and women represented in community participation?*

10. In terms of our volunteering, women are by far the most heavily represented. Having said that, a training session yesterday for cycling support volunteers saw 8 men (and no women) receive instruction! Further detailed statistics on volunteering can be provided by our volunteer manager.
11. In terms of more civic involvement, the picture is more even. At a recent meeting of Neilston's Town Team, attendance was 50/50. NDT's Board currently has 5 male and 4 female members.