



**Public Health, Housing  
and Regeneration:  
What Have We Learned  
From History?**

## INTRODUCTION

Large scale developments are currently being implemented by the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) and other housing providers in a number of areas of Glasgow which will affect both housing and the wider environment in which communities live and work.<sup>1,2</sup> The GoWell research and learning programme is a multi-dimensional, longitudinal evaluation of this housing regeneration programme. Over a ten-year period, the GoWell study will investigate the impacts of Glasgow's investment in housing and neighbourhood renewal on the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities in Glasgow. The programme aims to establish the nature and extent of these impacts, to learn about the relative effectiveness of different approaches, and to inform policy and practice in Scotland and beyond.

Much of GoWell is aimed at exploring the effects of these changes on the health and well-being of residents in 14 study areas. These developments will not happen within a vacuum. They occur within an ongoing historical and policy context at a national, regional, and local level. According to the socio-ecological model of health "it all matters."<sup>3</sup> Glasgow has changed markedly over the last century, physically, socially, culturally and demographically as well as in patterns of education, work, leisure and health. The 'ecological' component of GoWell sets out to provide balance to the main study by monitoring wider changes in the city and the surrounding area that could also influence the health of the study population and to embed and understand the changes within their historical and policy context. Thus, the aim of the ecological arm is to monitor city wide changes from a socio-ecological perspective and to provide a contextual backdrop to the main study, using a data driven and a narrative approach.

## AIMS AND PURPOSE

This briefing paper provides a short summary of the report 'Will Glasgow Flourish?: Learning from the past, analysing the present and planning for the future.' 'Will Glasgow Flourish?' was produced in order to provide the necessary wider context for the GoWell study and to help stimulate a constructive debate regarding the impact of past and present regeneration policy on the health and well-being of Glasgow citizens. It comprises: a review of the historical context of regeneration for Glasgow City throughout the 20th Century; key social and public health trends; a high level description of the policies, strategies and plans which influence current regeneration activity in the city; and a snapshot of Glasgow's situation at the beginning of the 21st Century. The concluding section reflects on strengths and weaknesses of past approaches and asks whether lessons from the past are truly being applied today. Greater detail and more in-depth exploration of the issues can be found in the full report which is available to read and download from the GoWell website ([www.gowellonline.com](http://www.gowellonline.com)).

**APPROACH AND METHODS**

This review was informed by a broad, socio-ecological approach to public health, and the ‘Let Glasgow Flourish’ report which brings together a comprehensive range of information on health and its determinants.<sup>3</sup> A range of literature in diverse topic areas was reviewed, including urban planning, housing and economic regeneration, social and public health history. Through this work, ‘Will Glasgow Flourish?: Learning from the past, analysing the present and planning for the future’ was produced.

The report was launched and discussed at a ‘Glasgow’s Healthier Future Forum’ event in Glasgow on 30th November 2007. Feedback from participants’ discussions, held as part of the event, highlighted the importance of social exclusion and isolation. Participants felt that there was a need to involve local people in a more meaningful way as the lack of true community development was perceived to be very marked. It was felt that disempowerment of local people and a lack of engagement would seriously hamper successful regeneration. A whole engagement and inclusion infrastructure was an essential ingredient.

The content of the report is summarised below.

**‘Will Glasgow Flourish?’**

**A ‘Story of Glasgow’ for the 20th Century**

The first section of the report describes the peaks and troughs of Glasgow’s political, economic and physical environment from the late Victorian era until the present day (early 21st Century) highlighting key events and influences that helped to shape Glasgow’s changing economy, infrastructure and housing.



Next, the authors explored some of the social and public health trends that shaped Glasgow people’s experience and quality of life over the course of the 20th Century. They drew out influences and events which impacted on health and the social fabric of Glasgow life.

## Waves of regeneration in Glasgow over the 20th Century

This section of the report summarises commentary by several authors on the philosophy behind, and the characteristics and impacts of, the successive waves of urban regeneration which took place in Glasgow. These waves of regeneration took place under the auspices of a number of political administrations and through different funding schemes during the second half of the 20th Century as an attempt to address the ongoing disparities in health, wealth and quality of life between different communities. It highlights influences, themes and tensions that featured during successive regeneration attempts.



## Emerging challenges to health and well-being at the beginning of the 21st Century

The authors reviewed the changing face of threats to public health and well-being in Glasgow at the beginning of the 21st Century through data from 'Let Glasgow Flourish' and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> These data show that many aspects of health and quality of life in Glasgow and its surrounding area still compare poorly with the rest of Scotland. Given that one of the tenets cutting through Scottish Governmental strategies and policies is to reduce inequalities, it was concluded that there is still a long way to go in achieving better and more equitable experience of health and quality of life for all of Glasgow's population.

## A summary of the policies, strategies and plans which influence current regeneration activity in the city

21st Century policies, strategies and plans attempt to address complex, interacting problems through a number of different routes and arenas. In order to place current regeneration activity in Glasgow within a contemporary policy context, the authors examined the way in which a raft of policies, strategies and plans envisaged the links between regeneration and population health. It was concluded that the policy context at the beginning of the 21st Century is based on a more integrated approach to the regeneration of areas of deprivation than previously. Also, regeneration activity does seem to be underpinned by explicit community engagement. However, it was noted that although this approach is more holistic than that used in previous cycles of regeneration, its effectiveness on the ground has still to be proven successful.

### **A description of current major regeneration initiatives**

The major regeneration activities on the ground that were actually in place or planned for the city are described in this section of the report. The authors concluded that there is, clearly, a resonance across strategies, policies and programmes in their aspirations and that the lessons of the past have been learned. Glasgow does have a comprehensive and integrated strategy for regeneration. However, questions remain as to whether these developments will help to address the legacy of Glasgow's poor health and inequality, raising three key questions regarding current regeneration strategy, policy and practice:



1. The scale of investment in public sector initiatives is dwarfed by private/commercial projects. Without good regulation and comprehensive strategic planning to make the best use of such investment, is there a risk of further widening in inequalities?
2. The growth in jobs depends, crucially, on retail and other service sector activity. If unexpected pressures arise, will this strategy render Glasgow vulnerable and less resilient than cities that have diversified to a greater extent?
3. It is now clear that climate change could have potentially devastating effects on population health and well-being. Will Glasgow's approach to development and regeneration provide it with the infrastructure it needs to mitigate the effects of climate change and help it to become a 'sustainable' city of the future?

## What will make Glasgow Flourish in the Future? A reflection

The final section reflects on what the authors consider some of the lessons from history have taught us and how best we might make use of these lessons today.

'Will Glasgow Flourish?' outlines the story of a city that has had a chequered history. After enjoying the accolade of 'Second City of the Empire' at the beginning of the 20th Century, Glasgow had to face many challenges and threats to its physical, social and economic infrastructure in the following decades. Almost continuous physical regeneration efforts and attempts to revitalise Glasgow's economy were a striking feature. What is even more striking about this period is the 'slippage' that took place in life expectancy and other indicators of health and well-being for Scotland's population, (mirrored more acutely in Glasgow), relative to other comparable European countries during the second half of the 20th Century.<sup>4</sup> Data from 'Let Glasgow Flourish' and other sources show that Glasgow is currently at the bottom of Scotland's league table for many indicators of health and well-being and that inequalities are growing.<sup>3</sup> There is good evidence that policy and strategy do now have a holistic view of regeneration, articulated across and between many different strands but, to date, there is no clear evidence that this aspiration is being translated into reality on the ground.

Whether or not Glasgow will be able to turn around this ongoing legacy of inequalities in health, well-being and quality of life could be the benchmark against which future generations will judge whether regeneration and renewal efforts, in their widest sense, have been successful or not.

The authors concluded 'Will Glasgow Flourish?' by raising a series of questions for debate:

1. Are there lessons still to be fully learned from history? For example, the lesson that regeneration requires adequate resources is clear from the historical analysis. Money and quality matter. Have we applied these lessons? Where, if anywhere, are the gaps?
2. In the past, the people of Glasgow suffered from the consequences of damaging political arguments. Do we now have a sufficiently strong consensus to secure the action needed?
3. While we now recognise limitations of high-rise buildings, at the time policy makers were carried away with the fashion of the day. Are we still the victims of fashion? Are there examples today that should be focused upon?
4. What are the health challenges of the 21st Century? Several trends are of concern including alcohol related harm, obesity, violent crime, depression and addictions. Should we link these problems with the regeneration challenge, and if so, how?
5. How fit for purpose is the current model of regeneration? A more holistic, complex and interconnected model of regeneration is being applied today than that used in the past. However, an examination of regeneration activity might suggest that more resources and clearer outcomes exist for housing regeneration compared with what is called 'wider action' or 'social regeneration'. Are we applying the lesson that regeneration is about more than 'bricks and mortar'? If not, what would help?

6. What outcomes can we expect from current regeneration activities? However generous the funding is for the regeneration of Glasgow's poorest areas, the investment in Glasgow's affluent areas is greater. Are current actions going to reduce inequalities?
7. How well prepared will Glasgow be for the 21st Century's surprises? We can be sure that challenges will come. How well will Glasgow respond to new external forces?



## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Glasgow City Council. *Glasgow City Plan Part 1 Development Strategy*. Glasgow: Glasgow City Council, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Glasgow Housing Association. *Neighbourhood renewal strategy 2005-2007*. [http://www.gha.org.uk/content/default.asp?page=s1\\_7\\_1](http://www.gha.org.uk/content/default.asp?page=s1_7_1) [2005].

<sup>3</sup> Hanlon P, Walsh D, Whyte B. *Let Glasgow Flourish*. Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Leon D, Morton S, Cannegieter S & McKee M. *Understanding the Health of Scotland's Population in an International Context - a review of current approaches, knowledge and recommendations for new research direction*. Glasgow: Public Health Institute of Scotland, 2003.

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