

# Sustainability and Regeneration in the East End of Newcastle

by Bob Langley & Peter Robinson

In this article, we aim to outline the story of the Church of England's involvement with regeneration in the East End of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne. We will give a brief description of the two regeneration programmes in which the Church is now involved. It will then be possible for us to discuss some critical issues that relate to the question of sustainability and to draw some conclusions.

A key moment in the Church's story was the foundation of the East Quayside Group (EQG) in 1988 as a response to proposals made by the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation (TWDC) for the east part of the quayside.<sup>i</sup>[i] The EQG was an ecumenical church initiative and employed a part-time worker. It aimed to enable local people not only to have knowledge of development proposals, but also to interpret them and to react appropriately. One activity was a door-to-door consultation by members of EQG; this allowed lobbying on issues to do with traffic patterns and also revealed a lack of awareness of the development proposals. In partnership with other groupings EQG maintained a dialogue with the Corporation and its developers and from the perspective of the churches and quayside residents, the redevelopment was influenced for the good.<sup>ii</sup>[ii]

When the TWDC was dissolved in 1998 two further regeneration initiatives in the East End of Newcastle were already underway. Out of the EQG had emerged not only a community development project, but also the Ouseburn Trust. This focused on the lower valley of the Ouseburn River, which runs into the Tyne just beyond the east quayside development area. Once at the heart of the industrial revolution in Tyneside, much of the valley lay derelict and there was a small residential population. The Trust saw the opportunity, in contrast to the way in which the TWDC development had happened, to involve those who live and work in the Valley to shape its substantial development potential. The Trust's vision was for a mixed-use, urban village, building on what was there already, honouring the history and enhancing the attractive valley environment. In 1996 the Trust formed a wider Ouseburn Partnership (OP) and led a successful SRB bid. A five-year programme, *The Ouseburn Valley, A Sustainable Future*, began in 1997.

Meanwhile, the local authority led East End Partnership (EEP) had been formed with a successful SRB programme beginning in 1996. This programme has received nearly £60million to be invested over seven years. In contrast to the Ouseburn Valley, the geographical coverage is much larger. Three political wards and part of two others have been designated a regeneration area, encompassing a population of around 35,000. One focus of the social and economic regeneration was to be the Shields Road, a main traffic artery into the City Centre, towards the northern boundary. Another focus was the upgrading of some parts of the social housing stock. The southern boundary is a natural basin in the River Tyne and attracting new industry to the riverside area was a third emphasis.

It is in the comparison between the two regeneration initiatives, and especially in the contrast between scales, that some critical points may be made about sustainability.<sup>iii</sup>[iii]

In the case of OP, the relatively small scale meant that the links between different projects could be seen clearly. A tightly defined area could be developed

so that components were mutually sustaining. For instance, the development of artists' studios and a café in a large Victorian warehouse could be linked into the growth of adjacent features – the growth of *City Farm*, an existing public house, a planned residential development and some new build. The nature of the Ouseburn Trust - its formation coming from a group of people with a common concern to regenerate the Quayside appropriately - ensured that such an integrated approach could be built in from the outset.

The significantly larger scale of EEP has meant that its sustainability has had a different emphasis. Due to the nature of its conception in negotiations between local authority officers, elected members and voluntary organisations a tension was apparent between the need for very local projects and an overall strategy across the large geographical area. The result has been admittedly high quality projects, but ones that do not always relate to each other and can appear as discrete units in comparison to the smaller scale regeneration in the Ouseburn Valley.

It has been a challenge for both partnerships to build in sustainability factors. At OP some 'sustainability guidance criteria' have been produced against which capital projects may be assessed. There are twelve indicators<sup>[iv]</sup>:

- Efficient use of resources
- Pollution
- Biodiversity
- Local living conditions
- Transport and mobility
- Basic needs
- Health and safety
- Employment
- Equal opportunities
- Skills and knowledge
- Empowerment
- Leisure and recreation

Applicants are required to assess their projects against each category, stating what is planned and also what is desirable but not possible due to budgetary constraints. The Partnership has a *Sustainability Indicators Group*, a panel of independent persons who then appraise each project. A project might be given positive, neutral or negative ratings. If an assessment is negative then the project is felt to be unsustainable. In this way a dialogue is established and recommendations may be made to make projects achieve a greater level of sustainability. However, ideals are not always fulfilled.

In the EEP, all projects are measured against a forward strategy and report to working groups overseeing particular areas of concern. Here also, it is apparent that economic factors have affected sustainability objectives. To give one instance, a large supermarket development was identified as the engine for economic growth at the west end of Shields Road, bringing extra trade to local businesses. These were consulted and proved to be in favour of the proposal. Much consideration was given to ensure that the design for the supermarket was strategic with the entrance to the store directly on to the main road, allowing mutually easy access with nearby shops. However, a series of delays in starting the supermarket development, including most recently a public enquiry, have had consequences. The plan for an adjacent grouping of retail units has

fallen through. The general increase in capital value in the area has led to proposals for development of brown field sites nearby, drawing away the very traders who might have profited from the new supermarket's presence. Market forces arising from the activity of regeneration can subvert the best-laid plans for sustainability. It is arguable that the delay itself can be traced to the same economic forces.

Laying down even well thought through criteria, therefore, is not an infallible strategy. However, both partnerships are seeing the benefit of sustainability through the more intangible category of human relationships. The OP has sub-headings for each indicator and under *empowerment* they are: *involving local people, freedom of information, partnership and community support network*. It is especially the case that the OP's emphasis on the area's rich industrial heritage means that there have been opportunities to demonstrate the relevance of the regeneration to local residents, enabling the community to play its part in the Valley's future and to promote relationships which may well be key to its long-term viability.

Creating relationships over a more dispersed regeneration project can be more complex. Recently, the EEP has initiated a *Voluntary Sector Forum* to cover the East End of the city. There are now three years of the SRB programme to run. It is perceived that both a deepening of involvement in regeneration activities by local communities and the creation of new partnerships are priorities for achieving sustainability. At present clergy are involved in the leadership and support of a steering group. The appointment of a Community Development Worker is planned, who will have a particular responsibility for consultation. The aim will be to research the many consultation exercises that have already taken place, to identify the gaps and also to assist in developing consultation methods that are appropriate to particular communities. It is the EEP's hope that this work will inform the City of Newcastle's *Going for Growth* strategy, which aims to stimulate regeneration across the whole city.

Inevitably, a short article gives only a small selection of the issues that two contrasting regeneration programmes face. Enough has been said, however, to remind us of the link between sustainability and the root meaning of ecology.<sup>v[v]</sup> Managing regeneration in the city is like managing an inhabited household. Here we have been comparing management of a large, highly populated household with a much smaller, more compact one. In each case the links between different particular regeneration projects are being worked into the household and the connections are being sought with neighbouring households. Perhaps in the smaller household the links that enable people to move comfortably from one room to another are easier to bring about? Perhaps in the larger household each room is in danger of being self-contained?

Each partnership programme recognises the need for sustainability to be placed at the heart of its operations, yet each has to deal with the constraints of a wider market. To stand a chance of success, there is agreement that sustainability needs to be a systematic process and involve the successful forging of relationships between people, communities and the physical components of regeneration.

From the Church's point of view, the involvement of Church personnel in the two partnerships would not have come about except through the work

of local clergy over the past fifteen years. Twelve years later there is much unfinished work. Not least the Church of England faces questions about the lives being lived by its local congregations. What might 'spiritual regeneration' mean for individual Christians and for our ecclesial life? Indeed, what might it mean for the Church across the city, whether or not a congregation is based in an inner city area experiencing regeneration?

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One of us, Bob Langley, has been involved in the regeneration of the city over the past fifteen years. He is currently Vice-Chairperson of the East End Partnership and Chair of both the Ouseburn Trust and the Ouseburn Partnership. He is currently Director of Ministry and Training. The other, Peter Robinson, has been a parish priest in the East End of Newcastle since the autumn of 1999. He also leads a Project aiming to enable the local churches to discover the meaning of spiritual regeneration in their corporate lives.

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i[i] I am drawing here on Ian G Falconer's Newcastle MA dissertation *East Quayside: A Theological Critique*. 1992, written whilst he was a parish priest in Newcastle's East End.

ii[ii] See Hilary Russell. *A Place for the Community? Tyne and Wear Development Corporation's Approach to Regeneration*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Policy Press. 1998 for a positive evaluation of the TWDC's community strategy.

iii[iii] The authors are grateful to Peter McIntyre, *Environmental Projects Officer*, Ouseburn Partnership and to Paul Gallagher, *Regeneration Manager*, East End Partnership for assistance with information for this article.

iv[iv] The list is cited in the appendix of DETR. *Sustainable Regeneration Good Practice Guide*. 1998.

iv[v] See Stephen R L Clark. *How to Think about the Earth: Philosophical and Theological Models for Ecology*. London: Mowbray. 1993, pp.128ff. 'Oikos' is used as a metaphor for the city in St Matthew 23 v 38. Also, the contrast between *oikos* (an inhabited household) and *domos* (the physical building) is significant for an understanding of sustainable regeneration.

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