

## Recommendations and Action Planning

Each diocese or church community needs to review its resource strategy, and in particular to prioritise its human and physical assets for the benefit of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the North East, many of which are in former coalfield areas.

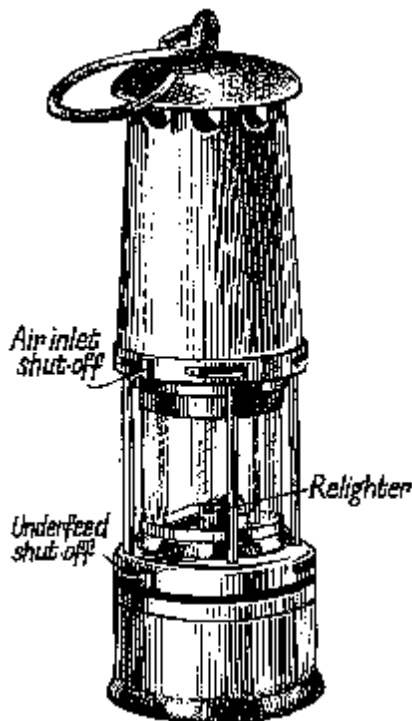
A community development strategy is needed. This should provide dedicated support for skill development and use of social audit techniques. A special focus is needed to encourage community economic development, which is underdeveloped at present.

Faith communities can take a more active role in regeneration partnerships, by encouraging local members to engage in decision-making bodies.

There is a regional role for development of a more consistent, better informed approach to fund-raising and project management by faith communities.

A regional framework to encourage inter-faith relationships for the benefit of local communities is needed.

Local faith communities need better access to the skills of their members through a skill-sharing mechanism, and an ICT strategy to facilitate better communications.



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## Coalfields Regeneration in North East England - the contribution of faith communities

### Origins

The Churches' Regional Commission in the North East, with support from the Church Urban Fund, conducted a survey and two review events in Autumn 2001, with the following aims:

- to promote and affirm positive contributions of faith community members to regeneration in the former coalfield areas
- to disseminate local models of good practice
- to audit current activity
- to provide training and capacity building for the Newcastle and Durham dioceses
- to influence ecumenical work within the coalfield areas
- to make recommendations to stakeholders, based on a coherent strategy for faith community involvement
- to influence the priorities of funders, especially the Coalfields' Regeneration Trust and the Church Urban Fund

### Activities

The events sought to involve ordinary faith community members from the former coalfield areas of Northumberland and Durham in a constructive dialogue about the potential for future policy development.

Each event included keynote speakers, from government offices, regional agencies and the Church. Workshops focused on learning from successful community-led projects tackling social, welfare and economic issues. Discussion groups considered the opportunities for further action and the conditions required for success.

In parallel, a questionnaire formed part of the review to audit the resources and activities within local churches, dedicated to serving local communities.

### Key Findings

Many church congregations contribute to the well-being of their neighbourhoods, in a variety of ways, including:

- offering a vision for the nature of a healthy society and human relationships – also providing links to wider networks and historical perspectives
- generating hope, inspiring practical action and concern for others
- being committed to sustaining local communities, providing stability and contributing to the local sense of tradition, identity and purpose
- belonging to the local community, and sharing its local knowledge and understanding
- serving the community, and ensuring provision for the socially excluded, and building positive relationships with other service providers. Filling the gaps in provision where appropriate
- valuing all people, and aligning themselves with the powerless and excluded
- empowering people to seek social justice, engage in community action, and challenge the adverse effects of wealth and power
- providing a resource, both of expertise and buildings, which is independent and permanent.

A summary of a report for the Churches Regional Commission by Fiona Clarke—Jan 2002

## Key policy issues that emerged:

- the need for faith communities and other institutions to deal positively with change, and to be willing to accept the risks of innovation in community ventures
- the need for faith communities to invest in a community development strategy for both urban and rural areas
- the responsibility of faith communities to engage fully in community affairs, to challenge exclusion, and to act as an enabler in partnership working
- the need to tackle funding for community regeneration more strategically
- the need for faith communities to involve themselves more in economic regeneration, including welfare support and employment generation, using their unique position in the community
- the need to continue supporting those people and neighbourhoods which are not economically viable, while they readjust.

## Suggestions for action included:

- developing a regional community development strategy
- tackling the fabric of some church buildings to make them more suitable for secular community use
- developing a strategy for funding regeneration activities by faith communities
- improving communication and networking between faith communities who are engaged in regeneration within the region
- Providing more support for isolated faith communities and tailoring recruitment practices to match the skills and experience needed by specific neighbourhoods
- Developing a resource strategy for each diocese or church community to find innovative ways of supporting local action

undertaken by individual churches, including family support, healthy living, disability support, and homeless projects.

## Economic development and enterprise

- 3.1 A small number of churches engaged specifically in economic development projects, including welfare advice and information, training programmes and credit unions.
- 3.2 Some were contemplating community enterprise.
- 3.3 Tourism was a significant role for certain historic churches.

## Partnership Working

- 4.1 Three-quarters of local churches worked in partnership with other denominations, and 39% worked with local community organisations. Others worked with charities, regeneration partnerships, schools, etc.
- 4.2 Only one parish reported working with a community of a different faith.

## Resources

- 5.1 60% of churches received no external funding, while small numbers had funded their outreach work from charitable trusts, the lottery or very occasionally through public resources.
- 5.2 Only three had received funding through the Church Urban Fund/ Coalfields' Regeneration Trust.

## Differences Between Durham and Newcastle Dioceses (Anglican)

- 6.1 A higher proportion of churches in the Newcastle Diocese responded to the questionnaire than in the Durham Diocese.
- 6.2 On average, churches in the Newcastle Diocese appeared more isolated and had a lower level of resources, in terms of both staff and facilities, than many of those in the Durham Diocese.
- 6.3 Durham churches offered slightly more activities, and had a higher level of engagement with regeneration partnerships

## Findings from the Questionnaire Survey

The return rate of questionnaires from priority coalfield parishes was high (42.7%).

### Personnel and buildings

- 1.1 Most parishes supported between one and three paid staff, and had an average of between eight and fifteen regular volunteers running activities.
- 1.2 Three-quarters of churches provided rooms for community use, and half also used other local premises for their activities.
- 1.3 Catering facilities were most frequently offered, and many churches also had play equipment and open space.
- 1.4 Only 10% offered access to computers.

### Activity

- 2.1 Apart from religious education, the most popular activities offered by local churches were community events, and regular social, welfare and recreational pursuits.
- 2.2 Pensioners' activities and play or toddler groups were offered by nearly half of all churches, alongside other regular leisure and recreation clubs.
- 2.3 A third of churches undertook youth-work, and more were planning such provision in the near future.
- 2.4 A wide range of innovative welfare activities were

## Priorities for the Christian Churches in Coalfield Regeneration

Despite decline in their own membership local churches have been responding to the changes, needs and new challenges within former coalfield communities, often in collaboration with other community organisations and statutory agencies. They would benefit from further strategic support and skill development. The key features of their contribution are:

- A caring and welfare role in the community
- Organisational skills, including planning and collective action
- Providing a sense of identity and purpose
- Leadership and campaigning on social issues
- Supporting economic regeneration particularly in the not-for-profit third sector.