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Coalfield Regeneration: May the Task Force be with you

Northern Economic Review 1999

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Focus of research

This paper examines the reclamation and re-use of former colliery sites and regeneration of coalfield communities. It concentrates on the East Durham coalfield area and examines the variety of agencies, initiatives and funding packages that are attempting to regenerate land and settlements. In particular it examines the operation of the East Durham Task Force (EDTF) which has been held as an exemplar of community and coalfield (sub-regional) regeneration. The EDTF was created by Durham County Council and has been operating since 1991, before the last few pits in East Durham closed. EDTF has been proactive in attracting funding to East Durham in the form of EZ's, European, English Partnerships and central government funding. It is a model that the government would like to see adopted in other coalfield areas.

At the Coalfields conference, in Peterlee in December 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott announced a package of measures for England's coalfields including £350m of dedicated money over three years. He announced the creation of a Coalfield Regeneration Trust to provide support for community projects, a Coalfield Enterprise Fund to provide money for small firms plus additional funding for English Partnerships' coalfield programme (DETR,1998a). The announcement was in response to the Coalfields Task Force report and Mr Prescott indicated that much of the money will be used to improve infrastructure and provide incentives for potential employers. This is the sort of activity that has been quietly taking place in East Durham under the auspices of the East Durham Task Force, with the help of English Partnerships, for most of the decade.

The decline of coal mining in County Durham

The coal mining industry in the county had contracted significantly before the 1984 miners strike, but its decline was more rapid after this event. By 1993 no deep coal mines remained in a county, that at its peak, once boasted 145 pits. The decimation of the industry is reflected by the statistic that in 1951, 25,000 people were directly employed in the coal mining industry, by 1993 there were none (EDTF,1997).

Mining settlements are often remote and so dependent on the pit that closure resulted in widespread problems such as a downturn in the local economy resulting in more job losses, a lack of investment in housing and infrastructure and social and cultural decline. These problems are often accentuated by the presence of large scale dereliction in the form of spoil heaps and redundant buildings. In functional terms, settlements lost their economic base and whilst still retaining the majority of their population, are blighted by the legacy of their past.

The Coalfields Task Force Report acknowledges that for these reasons the coalfields are a priority in their own right. The number of jobs in the East Durham area fell from 28,600 in 1984 to 19,700 in 1995, a decline of 31% attributable to the loss of approximately 10,000 jobs in the mining industry over the period (EDTF,1997). This has been accompanied by a decline in population of 12% between 1971 (110,000) and 1994 (96,800).

The real rate of unemployment in County Durham, as a whole, is estimated to be in excess of 20%, the highest of any coalfield area and the county also has the highest rate of long term illness. The Coalfield Task Force also noted that the continuing problem of mining villages in West Durham tends to be overlooked because of the scale of the more recent closures in East Durham (Coalfields Task Force,1998).

The location of the last pits to close in East Durham is shown in map 1; table 1 indicates the proposed end use and sponsor agency for each former colliery site. The comparative costs of reclaiming the colliery sites for hard or soft end use are also shown where figures are available.

Government intervention in the Coalfields

Coalfields have a unique combination of concentrated joblessness, physical isolation, poor infrastructure and severe health problems. The contraction of the coal industry has been so rapid that mainstream government programmes have failed to readjust to offer an adequate level of support (Coalfields Task Force,1998).

Coal mining areas have a long history of derelict land reclamation and other remedial measures following pit closures, however until recently less attention has been paid to the local economies and communities. For example, in 1994 the Conservative Government responded to the loss of the last deep coal mines in East Durham by designating six Enterprise Zones, a predictable reaction to the plight of an area struggling to come to terms with the loss of its main industry. The situation was not dissimilar to the designation of EZ's in Sunderland following the closure of the last shipyard on the Wear in the late eighties.

This was soon followed by the transfer of four British Coal sites, totaling over 200ha, to English Partnerships; these were Vane Tempest and Seaham, Dawdon, Foxcover and Hawthorn (see map 1). Two of the sites (Dawdon and Foxcover) have EZ status and swift action was needed to ensure these sites were brought on stream before a significant proportion of the benefits had been eroded by time.

The rationale for the transfer was that the British Coal estate, which contained a mixture of sites of value and some major liabilities, could have been packaged as a mixed portfolio when British Coal was sold to the private sector. However, this would have reduced the amount of money the Government received for the sale and there would be no prospect of many of the derelict and contaminated sites being reclaimed by the private sector.

This would have been an unsatisfactory outcome and may have stifled the progress that urgently needed to be made in turning the English coalfields round.

English Partnerships involvement was logical in this context because they have a track record of land reclamation and were perfectly suited to preparing and implementing the reclamation and servicing of the sites in a short timescale. In addition, such activity contributes to three of EP's four key objectives, namely to improve the environment through land reclamation, support area and mixed use regeneration and to bring forward strategic sites for development (EP,1995).

The reclamation of the former British Coal sites in East Durham is contributing to a programme of land reclamation in four English coalfields, comprising 56 sites (2206ha in total) which is probably the largest attempted in the UK and has been described as the biggest step forward for the coalfields since the pit closures began (EP,1997a).

This programme has been expanded by the announcement that 27 additional sites (two of which are in East Durham) are to be the subject of early action by EP (Coalfields Task Force,1998). The portfolio of coalfield sites will continue to be managed by English Partnerships, in cooperation with the Regional Development Agencies within a ring-fenced budget of £350m over ten years (DETR,1998a).

East Durham Task Force

The Coalfield Task Force Report, Making a Difference, published in June 1998, recognised that appropriate delivery mechanisms will be crucial to the successful implementation of their recommendations and identified local regeneration partnerships as an important vehicle to facilitate their delivery. Effective partnerships are the key to successful regeneration programmes and the most successful have built on the traditional social cohesion of coalfield communities (Coalfields Task Force,1998). Despite the important influence of the EDTF model, neither of the case studies in the Task Force Report are from the North East coalfield which encouraged the author to research the Task Force in more detail.

The County Council had the foresight to intervene some time before central government deemed it necessary and was able to forge partnerships with a number of public and private sector organisations. It was a practical response to the problems highlighted above and was a genuine partnership seeking to focus attention and action of the partners on the problems rather than being an agency with its own delivery function.

With reference to the Typology of Partnerships developed by Bailey et al (see table 2) East Durham Task Force falls somewhere between a joint agreement, coalition, company type of partnership and a strategic partnership. The task force has a clearly defined area (Easington District), has a range of public, private and voluntary sector partners and is involved in the preparation of formal strategy with implementation through third parties.

This is illustrated by the Programmes for Action published in 1991, 1993 and 1997 which have grown increasingly ambitious and comprehensive as the momentum has increased. The membership of the Task Force has grown year by year as has funding and expenditure.

However the task force also has the characteristics of a strategic partnership covering a sub-regional area, working with all sectors and determining a broad strategy for growth and development and accessing EU funds, something EDTF has been particularly successful at doing. It is at this sub-regional level of operation that there is potential for friction between the task force and the new Regional Development Agency for the north east, ONE (North East).

The Task Force also exhibits some traits of a Development trust, through its Settlement Renewal initiative, where selected pit villages are being returned to rural settlements by working with the local community to improve the physical environment of the settlement and identify and respond to local needs. This approach empowers local residents and may attract new ones because of the improved environment and character of the settlement, which should enhance the economic well being of the villages.

Reclamation of colliery sites

Colliery sites are often characterised by their inferior location, poor access, outdated infrastructure and derelict condition. As a result, most are unsuitable for hard end use or EZ designation, because by the time they are reclaimed half the life of the zone may have expired. Dawdon is the only former colliery site to be designated as an EZ and has been brought forward so quickly that it was available for development with eight years of EZ status remaining. This was only possible by the immediate reclamation of the site by English Partnerships and the construction of a European funded link road between Seaham and the A19 which bisects the site.

Other colliery sites do not have such potential and will revert to soft 'green' usage such as public open space and community woodland (EP 1998), examples include Easington, Hawthorn, Murton and Seaham High (see Table 1). EP would like to develop sites for hard end use to generate outputs which contribute to their performance criteria (Greenhalgh & McCafferty, 1996), however the majority of former colliery sites will be reclaimed for soft end use because of their "rural" location. With limited resources EP give such sites low priority EP and as a result they will have to wait until the key development sites have been advanced.

The Coalfield Task Force's concern that there was a shortage of readily accessible serviced sites in the coalfields, is not true of East Durham where there is a good supply of development sites within close proximity of the A19, many of which benefit from EZ status and fully developed infrastructure (see map 1)

The standard of reclamation adopted by EP is 'suitable for use' although in some circumstances a site may be reclaimed to a higher standard if there is potential for hard end use in the future, for example Hawthorn and Seaham high. The timescale for reclamation of these sites will be up to five years.

Planning in the coalfield

Given the pro-active attitude adopted by Durham County Council in establishing a Task Force for regenerating East Durham, it is pertinent to consider how the planning system at a local level has performed. The Coalfields Task Force Report identified the restrictive nature of national planning guidance in respect of development within green belts and the countryside generally (Planning Policy Guidance Notes numbers 2 and 7 respectively).

In the case of East Durham, all the former colliery sites lie within Easington District (see map 1). As early as 1983, the District Council prepared a district-wide local plan and part of its job was to plan for and tackle the transition from coal mining employment. The Council built industrial estates and included proposals within the local plan to re-use collieries for alternative employment. Derelict Land Grant was used for reclamation and infrastructure provision and between 1983 and 1990 the Council built around 150 factory units using its own funds, and European Structural Funds (RECHAR and IDOP programmes). The sites for these developments had been identified in the local plan.

The Council anticipated in the 1980's that more collieries were going to close but faced the political difficulty of identifying which ones would actually do so. There were general policies in the plan for hard end use and the plan acted as a framework which assisted the industrial and environmental programmes of the Council. Nevertheless, by the late 1980's the Council realised that it was fighting a losing battle against mining job losses and lobbied central government for support but with little success. At the time, the government's priority was on urban regeneration and the vehicles to deliver this were the Urban Development Corporations.

The Task Force programme for action, set out at its inception, included ideas from the statutory local plan, for example, strategic employment sites. However, by the early 1990's the local plan team at Easington District, responsible for monitoring and reviewing the development plan, was under increasing pressure to bid for funds and in effect became a dedicated local economic unit. The local plan was given low priority. This period coincided with the growth of the Task Force but its perspective is wider than that of a land use development plan. The statutory 1983 local plan dictated the exact location of new housing and employment and the review of the local plan has taken on board some of the ideas set out in the Task Force documents. In effect, the two different approaches are feeding off one another.

The principal drawback with the development plan approach towards regenerating collieries and coalfield areas is that, generally speaking, a development plan is unable to implement or deliver proposals. These two

outcomes depend upon other players, principally the private sector with the public sector supporting through pump priming or gap funding projects. In an area such as East Durham, where land values are generally much lower than non-coalfield areas, "the market" needs stimulus from the public sector. Without such stimulus the plan can remain just a vision.

Another deficiency with the development plan as a tool for delivering regeneration is that "the market" proposes projects which are either in conflict with the plan or have not been anticipated by the plan. In some cases, for example Foxcover, which was a greenfield site with EZ status ripe for early development, a departure from the development plan was required because the proposals were in conflict with the plan. At Dalton Flatts, a privately-owned brownfield site, outside the Task Force's coverage, a planning application has been received for development of a multiplex cinema, shopping and other uses. There is a limited market demand for such uses and there are implications for regeneration policy across the whole East Durham area. The Dalton Flatts site may not be the best site in planning terms for such development, but a decision has to be made on its planning merits.

The development plan framework is partially successful as a regeneration tool but needs to complement and work with a wider mechanism, going beyond land use planning. This is where an opportunity exists for sub-regional influence via the Task Force model as well as integration with strategic level regional planning guidance. It will be interesting to observe how such decisions are made now that the Regional Development Agencies are in place and preparing region wide economic strategies.

Funding regeneration in the coalfields

The funding for regeneration projects in the Task Force area comes from a wide variety of sources including District and County Council, EP, British Coal, Europe, National Lottery and Regional Selective Assistance. European money is only available on a matched funding basis where finance from another source has to be pledged of the same quantum as the grant assistance before the latter is released. This is where the Task Force approach can lever in additional funds by the coordination and cooperation of partners in order to attract maximum European funding.

A good example is the Turning the Tide millennium project which aims to restore 18km of the Durham coastline through a £9.9m programme supported by a £4.5m grant from the Millennium commission, £2.3m from EP, £1m from the EU, £0.8m from the Countryside Commission and £1.3m from other sources.

The Task Force Report estimates that over £200m of European money has been attracted to the coalfields every year, most having objective 2 status, and the UK is the biggest recipient of RECHAR funding in Europe securing 40% of the budget (Coalfields Task Force, 1998). East Durham alone has attracted RECHAR funds of £8.5m to 1999 (Durham County Council, 1997).

European financial support is critical to the coalfields but this funding source is under threat.

The coalfields will remain eligible for European funding from 2000-2006 but there is uncertainty as to the scale and availability of resources. The best prospect is for the coalfields to secure Objective 1 or 2 status as RECHAR funding is set to disappear. Whilst some coalfields should qualify for Objective 1, East Durham will narrowly fail and there is a risk that the North East region may fail to meet the Objective 2 criterion of unemployment level due to UK unemployment rates being lower than many European countries. However the East Durham Strategic Development Area has already been approved for substantial ERDF Objective 2 (priority 3.1) status funding (DETR,1998a). This will build on the £4.4m of Objective 2 funding allocated for 1997-99, which in combination with Social Funding gives a European funding package for Easington District alone of £5.8m over two years (Easington District Council,1998).

Delivery: the Task Force approach

The task force model is a valuable addition to the tools of regeneration available to provide assistance to areas suffering from structural economic decline and exhibiting the classic symptoms of multiple deprivation. The benefits of such an approach are:

More funding is attracted

The existence of a task force and its activity attracts more funding which is a response to the framework and greater certainty and confidence engendered by the task force approach. Easington District has benefited because the EP funded activity is work that the Council would have needed to carry out and it has allowed them to concentrate their time and resources on other priorities.

National or European funds do not simply replace or substitute for local public funds but also lever in additional funding from the private and voluntary sectors which would not have been secured but for the priming from the public sector and organisation of the task force.

Regeneration as opposed to reclamation

The task force has a wider role than previous tools of regeneration incorporating social (soft) regeneration as well as the harder environmental and reclamation activities. It is now recognised by national and European policy makers that regeneration of an area containing settlements requires more than physical renewal alone. Community regeneration is an important part of the task force's work and has been focussed on the Settlement Renewal Initiative.

Identification of responsibility

The task force model provides a body which stakeholders and participants in the regeneration process can ally themselves with and which can promote specific projects, but at the same time respond to community concerns. The dialogue between partners leads to better coordination and implementation of

regeneration and a transparent allocation of responsibility avoids apathy and disconnection.

Focus on a shared vision

This creates an ownership and focus for the activity which maintains progress and avoids deviations and the tendency towards ad hoc decisions lacking coherent strategy. Partners are signed up to the vision which engenders greater commitment and an obligation to perform.

Effective conflict resolution

An inclusive partnership of all key stakeholders should reduce the incidence of conflict but where it does arise there should be a speedier resolution of differences.

Rapid response to opportunities

A task force can respond quickly to opportunities as they arise and indeed pre-empt problems occurring. This ability depends upon having key agencies on board such as government departments and funding bodies and having a fast decision making capability to ensure opportunities are not missed.

Transparency, consultation and avoidance of duplication

The task force should communicate its plans and progress to the communities affected by its actions as well as soliciting and responding to their suggestions and views.

The findings of the research are broadly consistent with the characteristics of partnership identified by the Task Force Report which lists eight such features:

- the involvement and full commitment of all key local players and in particular the involvement of communities as equal partners
- the development of a realistic vision for the partnership's work that addresses the hard choices many communities will face
- the development of a strategic action plan which covers the full range of issues in a holistic manner and sets priorities so as to avoid a scatter gun approach
- a willingness to make concessions in order to come to a shared realistic vision and an agreed implementation plan
- real responsibility accepted by all partners for the implementation of the programmes agreed in the action plan
- the attitude of trust, honesty and openness on the part of all partners, and a willingness to listen and learn
- clear and regular lines of communication established by the partnership with local people

- a long-term commitment made by all partners to the partnership and its action plan

(Coalfields Task Force, 1998)

The prospects for coalfield regeneration

The Task Force model is proving to be a robust and effective tool in tackling concentrated and structural social, economic and environmental problems within a defined geographic area. The long term programme with additional funding recently announced by the Government consolidates this approach and suggests that its use may become more widespread in the future.

It is worth speculating about the prospect for coalfield regeneration now that the Regional Development Agencies have taken on the administration of the Single Regeneration Budget, the regional responsibilities of EP and the regeneration programmes of the Rural Development Commission (DETR, 1998a). The Coalfield Programme is to be taken forward jointly by EP and the RDA's, but overall co-ordination of the programme will remain with EP (DETR, 1998a). The Supplementary Guidance to RDA's (DETR 1999) confirms that the coalfield portfolio will operate as a single programme, with receipts being recycled, under a service level agreement between the coalfields RDA's and EP, which sets out their respective responsibilities and the associated financing arrangements in respect of progressing the programme.

A significant degree of control therefore remains with a non-elected government body, rather than being passed over to the new RDA's or local authorities. English Partnerships will continue to be responsible for administering regeneration and reclamation in coalfield areas although they will be expected to work in partnership with the new RDA's. Uncertainty still persists about the role and operation of the RDA's and there is the danger that coalfield areas will fall between them and Local Authorities, which is perhaps the reason for EP's continued involvement.

RDA's will have to recognise sub-regional differences, developing effective working relationships with sub-regional partnerships, making links across regions as well as within, and learning from the good practice and experience of existing partnerships (DETR, 1998b). In some regions, sub-regional and local priorities differ considerably and this has led for calls for RDA's to develop and implement sub-regional economic strategies and operational procedures (Roberts et al, 1998). It is hoped that some of the best practice lessons and experience from this study of the activity of East Durham Task Force and its partners in the North East of England will be valuable in this respect.

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Table 1: Key former coal mining sites in East Durham

NAME OF COLLIERY	AREA (HA)	COST OF RECLAMATION TO SOFT (£M)	COST OF REDEV'T TO HARD (£M)	CLOSURE DATE	START DATE	COMPLETION DATE	END USE	SPONSOR AGENCY (PARTNER)
Blackhall	41	Unknown	N/A	unknown	1996 (1977/83/91)	unknown	Nature Reserve	DCC (EP)
Dawdon	32.8	1.8	3.1	1991	1994 (1988)	1998	Ind & H'way	EP (DCC) EZ
Dalton Flatts	41.7	Coal extraction	Unknown	unknown	1995	1999	Ind & Com	Private
Easington	32	3.2	N/A	1993	1998	1999	POS & retail	EDC (TtT)
Hawthorn	83.8	8.7	20.6	1992	1999	2003	POS; strategic ind	EP
Horden	63	1.35	N/A	unknown	1987	1998	Nature reser	DCC (TtT)
Murton	13.5	0.6	N/A	1991	1993	1996	Res & POS	EDC (DCC)
Seaham High	19.4	0.9	3.9	1993	1996 (1974)	1999	5ha POS; strategic res	EP (EDC)
S. & E. Hetton	97	6.2 (Phase1 3.6)	N/A	1983	1991 (1986)	1999	Ag / forest	EDC/EP
Vane Tempest	27.9	1.6	16.3	1993	1994	1999	Res & POS	EP (EDC)
TOTAL	452.1	24.35	43.9					

End uses:

Ag Agricultural
 Com Commercial
 Ind Industrial
 POS Public Open space
 Res Residential
 H'way Highway

Sponsor Agencies:

DCC Durham County Council
 EDC Easington District Council
 EP English Partnerships
 EZ Enterprise Zone
 TtT Turning the Tide

Table 2 – A typology of partnerships

Type	Mobilization	Area of coverage	Range of partners	Remit	Examples
Development	Locally	Single site or small area	Private developer, housing association, local authority	Joint development to mutual advantage	Commercial/non-profit developments producing mutual benefit
Development trust	Locally	Neighbourhood	Community-based with LA & other representatives	Community-based regeneration	Coin Street, Woodlands Trust
Joint agreement, coalition, company	Locally but may be in response to national policy	Clearly defined area for regeneration	Public, private, and sometimes voluntary	Preparation of formal/informal strategy implementation often through third parties	City Challenge, Birmingham Heartlands
Promotional	Locally	District or city-wide	Private sector-led. Sponsored by Chamber of Commerce or development agency	Place marketing, promotion of growth and investment	The Newcastle Initiative, East London Partnership
Agency	Nationally based on legislative powers	Urban or sub-regional	Public sector sponsored with private sector appointees	Terms of reference from sponsoring agency	UDC's, TEC's, LEC's
Strategic	Regional, county, local	Sub-regional, metropolitan	All sectors	Determining broad strategy for growth & development & accessing EU	North Kent Forum, London First

				funds	
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From Bailey et al (1995) Partnership Agencies in British Urban Policy

Absract

In October 1997 the Deputy Prime Minister set up the Coalfield Task Force to identify and develop a specific and comprehensive programme of action to assist communities which had been affected by pit closures (DETR,1998a). Their report The Government's response to their report has been to announce £354m of additional money over three years to fund a comprehensive programme of action to combat the deprivation faced by the coalfield communities (DETR 1998a). The Government is to implement a number of the Task Force recommendations including the creation of a Coalfield Regeneration Trust to support community initiatives, a Coalfield Enterprise Fund to support small firms and a Partnership Fund to encourage private/public joint ventures (DETR,1998a).

The paper studies the performance of the East Durham Task Force which has been recognised as a model of coalfield regeneration partnership. Interviews were completed with Task Force members, local government officers and English Partnerships staff in order to build an impression of regeneration activity in East Durham and identify the benefits accruing from the Task Force approach.

The role of English Partnerships in East Durham

It is a priority for EP to reclaim the former British Coal sites, of which there are nine in the North East Region (see table 1) totaling 313.6ha, 289ha of which are in urgent need of reclamation. Five of these sites are located in East Durham, two of which, Dawdon and Foxcover, have Enterprise Zone status, the latter being a greenfield site. EP predict that reclamation will generate 163ha of land for soft end use and 83ha for industry, the remaining 67ha to be reclaimed for residential use (EP,1997b). To date the reclamation of two sites, Dawdon and Rainton Bridge, has been completed, contributing to a total of 62ha of reclaimed land of which 42ha is serviced for development (DETR,1998a).

Table 1: Sites transferred from British Coal to English Partnerships in the North East in 1996

LOCATION	AUTHORITY	CONDITION	AREA (HA)	END USE
North Hylton	Sunderland	arable	21.9	industrial
Rainton Bridge	Sunderland	arable	2.3	industrial
Westoe	South Tyneside	former colliery	18.1	mixed use
Monkton	South Tyneside	former cokeworks	19.5	industrial & public open space

Weetslade	Newcastle	former colliery	49.1	industrial & public open space
Vane Tempest	Easington	former colliery	27.9	residential & public open space
Seaham	Easington	former colliery	19.4	residential & public open space
Dawdon	Easington	former colliery	32.8	industrial (EZ), highways & pos
Foxcover	Easington	arable	38.8	industrial (EZ)
Hawthorn	Easington	former cokeworks	83.8	public open space
		TOTAL (HA)	313.6	

Source: English Partnerships (1997) Partnership opportunities in England's Coalfields

The external audit of the coalfield sites, undertaken before they were transferred from British Coal to EP, suggested appropriate end uses and likely costs of decontamination and reclamation. On sites with very high reclamation costs EP must give the Coal Authority advance notice of how the remediation is to be carried out and the likely cost of such works. This is because the Moynihan Agreement is on a promise to pay rather than finance being provided up front. The contribution of British Coal to the reclamation of a site will thus go to a specific site and only covers basic reclamation to soft end use standard. The real costs of full reclamation will be perhaps two to three times greater especially if reclamation is for hard end use (see table 2).