



**SURF**  
Scotland's Regeneration Forum

SURF : sharing experience : shaping practice

# **SURF ALLIANCE FOR ACTION**

## **REVIEW: ROTHESAY/BUTE**



**As part of a process covering all five sites in SURF's Alliance for Action programme, this Rothesay/Bute focused review reflects on:**

**the original intended outcomes;**

**changed and current circumstances;**

**and future options.**

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## CONTEXT

SURF's Alliance for Action programme supports collaborative activity and shared learning in cross sector, community focused regeneration. SURF currently (2020) facilitates five place based Alliance for Action initiatives across Scotland. In facilitating enhanced cooperation between relevant local and national partners on shared priorities, the purpose of the programme is to:

- build local capacity, strengthen resilience, increase practical outcomes and improve the wellbeing of local residents;

- link local knowledge, initiatives and assets with national networks, policies and resources in support of more coordinated and holistic regeneration activity;
- draw out transferable learning towards more successful and sustainable policy and practice in community regeneration.

The programme is delivered with support from the Scottish Government and the National Lottery Community Fund. Additional financial and in kind support is provided by relevant, local and national agency partners.

## WHY ROTHESAY/BUTE?

In 2014, SURF was commissioned by Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) to carry out a feasibility study on the scope for the successful introduction of its 'Alliance for Action' approach in Rothesay/Bute.

HIE had been impressed by SURF's work in its two original sites in Govan, Glasgow, and East Kirkcaldy, Fife, and were keen to explore whether the Alliance model could help to address shared regeneration challenges in Rothesay/Bute.

SURF went on to produce a feasibility study for HIE, in cooperation with Argyll & Bute Council (A&BC) and other key stakeholders. It recommended that an Alliance for Action model could be effective in identifying shared priorities and connecting assets and activities to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders, thereby making a significant contribution to the realisation of collective regeneration aspirations. For SURF, Rothesay/ Bute would be a useful test of the Alliance for Action model in a small town/island context.

SURF's outline proposal was welcomed by all stakeholders and it was agreed that SURF would lead a 100-day collaboration to:

- develop a practical plan with adequate local and political leadership
- consult towards a sufficiently widely shared vision of purpose, partners & priorities
- implement priority actions – enhance local, regional and national links - record & review

That work successfully established the Rothesay/Bute Alliance for Action initiative (which later evolved into the Bute Island Alliance - BIA) in cooperation with a

community and cross sector stakeholders group. Supporters of the initiative included HIE, Argyll & Bute Council and their Townscape Heritage project, Scottish Towns Partnership, FirstPort, The Pavilion, Visit Bute, Fyne Homes, Fyne Futures Ltd, Rothesay Academy, Argyll College, The Buteman, the Community Council and Mount Stuart Trust Ltd (which additionally served as an intermediate recipient for funding, until the BIA was formally constituted as an SCIO).

## **BACKGROUND**

Ongoing population decline and the resultant implications for the local economy and associated services and opportunities, including the departure of younger and economically active people, was the main pre-existing regeneration concern on the island.

In addition to interlinked challenges of town centre degeneration and the declining physical fabric of significant buildings, there was a broad view that centralised physical and economic planning processes, were not connecting adequately with local challenges, assets and aspirations.

There was also a legacy of inadequate trust and cohesion between key stakeholders, in part due to the failure of previous local cooperative regeneration initiatives.

HIE's invitation to SURF was fuelled by a recognition that there was potential for better connecting a range of regeneration investments and challenges, including:

- the substantial refurbishment of the iconic Pavilion building
- the potential of a phase 2 THI funding application
- the fabric and connectivity of the harbour and town centre
- lack of employment, incoming under-skilled residents and associated social regeneration issues
- the evolving premises and digital requirements for supporting small business
- improving public services, transport connections, and the island's tourism offer.

There was, however, generally shared optimism about the potential of Rothesay and Bute in view of its considerable heritage, environmental and civic assets. Not least the Mount Stuart Trust and its newly restated wish to re-engage its expertise and assets with those of other stakeholders, to mutual benefit.

It was noted at the time that SURF's involvement (in facilitating a collaborative approach to linked aspects of local regeneration) was a factor in the decision of the then Heritage Lottery Fund to agree an HIE and ABC supported £2 million THI Stage 2 investment, focused on the physical regeneration of the town centre<sup>1</sup>.

In further support of that inclusive town centre focus, SURF's Rothesay Alliance for Action enabled a £25k Scottish Government and A&BC investment in a substantial and inclusive Community Charrette Planning Process, focused on Rothesay town centre, which was conducted over February 2016

The essential requirement of a partner investment of a further £5K was negotiated by SURF with Mount Stuart Trust in its new role as an Alliance for Action partner. Administrative and procurement processes were provided pro bono by SURF and A&BC as part of the Alliance for Action effort. The selection and briefing of the consultants who were to deliver the Charrette process (Ice Cream Architecture Ltd) were coordinated by SURF via the Alliance for Action Stakeholders group.

The resultant process provided an inclusive basis for debating and agreeing a coherent set of shared regeneration priorities. It drew on the knowledge and experience of various local and national partners to cooperatively prioritise physical town centre assets, connections, challenges and possibilities. These shared priorities became the agreed original basis for the Alliance for Action activity plans.

## REVIEW METHOD

In cooperation with the BIA, SURF convened a gathering of all key partners on 7.6.19 to review respective perspectives on cooperative progress so far and future prospects.

Having agreed the purpose and process of a formal review with all key partners, SURF carried out desk-based research to reconfirm original aims, priorities and partners and to summarise the subsequent development and delivery processes.

SURF designed and distributed a survey to key representative stakeholders. It sought current views on those original priorities. It also invited feedback on

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<sup>1</sup> The first Rothesay THI, of £4.2 million in 2011, included £500,000 from Historic Environment Scotland £107,000 from the LEADER European funding programme and £550,000 from Argyll and Bute Council itself, and contributions from property owner beneficiaries.

successes, changes and challenges towards achieving those goals, and views on whether and how SURF's relationship with Rothesay/Bute might most appropriately develop.

All stakeholders responded to the survey and SURF followed through with one to one interviews, to better contextualise and more fully understand their expressed views.

SURF reflected on, and analysed collected feedback. Based on that information and opinions, it then developed options as to whether and how its support role could usefully continue.

## MAIN POINTS FROM REVIEW

- Priorities remain unchanged
- There has been improved collaboration and partnership working
- Bute/Rothesay's profile has been raised nationally
- Valuable links have been made to other communities, academic researchers, funders, policymakers, enterprise bodies and other national agencies
- Reality based transferable learning has been presented and promoted across a broad range of networks, including academic forums and publications, meetings with relevant SG officials and ministers, parliamentary cross-party groups and third sector agencies and networks.
- Additional resources were secured, although expectations of core funding and additional external investment for realising shared aims, were not fully realised
- Progress on projects and outcomes has been slower than expected
- Overburdened volunteer burn-out and difficulties of sustaining local leadership and unpaid stakeholder input, reflect national findings.<sup>2</sup>
- Historic grievances pre-dating the Alliance negatively impacted on communications and collaboration
- The majority of stakeholders who participated in the review were in agreement about the positive benefits brought by the development of the BIA, as a vehicle for local regeneration collaboration. There was however, some criticism from original BIA partners of internal communication and governance processes.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering\\_health\\_wellbeing\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering_health_wellbeing_full_report.pdf)

## REVIEW FINDINGS IN DETAIL

### Priorities

The Charrette consultative process had originally identified retaining and growing the population as the key goal. It further identified three 'pathway priorities' towards achieving that goal. Those were:

- Economic Development/Employment
- Physical Infrastructure
- Cooperation/Communication/Coordination

Those priorities were adopted by SURF's original Alliance for Action stakeholder group. (The stakeholder group became the fully constituted Bute Island Alliance (BIA)<sup>3</sup> in 2016).

Participants in the review were asked to reflect on the original goals in the context of the current regeneration climate. They agreed that:

Priorities remained the same.

#### **Economic Development/Employment**

Economic development – and particularly the creation of employment - remained crucial for successful regeneration. There was agreement that economic development goals had to focus on supporting business and creating additional, sustainable employment on the island.

Developing a more coherent approach to securing the benefits of increased tourism was seen as essential. The main priorities being an enhanced visitor market and developing **Physical Infrastructure** to support it. Ongoing development at Rothesay Pavilion, Rothesay Townscape Heritage, the Discovery Centre, Mount Stuart's plans for Mansion House, the Pier, the refurbishment of the former Ritz cinema, other infrastructure projects and ongoing transport reviews, were all seen as crucial to the Rothesay/Bute revival.

#### **Cooperation/Communication/Coordination**

There was majority agreement that cooperation and communication/coordination had improved. SURF's role as an objective outside organisation had encouraged collaboration, although there remained

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<sup>3</sup> The BIA is a registered charity. It has 6 elected trustees and 50 stakeholder organisations and individuals as members. It had a part-time paid co-ordinator between 2016 and 2018.

room for improvement. One stakeholder felt there was a lack of understanding and agreement about what was needed and a lack of focus on the things that could achieve that. There was acknowledgement of historic differences between stakeholders, which may have impacted on cooperation. Overall goals for the island had been clarified and were viewed as now being better aligned, although there remains ongoing debate about the best delivery route.

*"SURF has brought considerable expertise and experience to Bute."*

## Progress

- Initial engagement and consultation was welcomed and positive.
- Widespread community support, as demonstrated by the response to public meetings, engagement in the Charrette processes and further feasibility studies and place-making activities. (An early public meeting organised by the Community Council attracted 120 people).
- More than 350 businesses, individuals, schools and community groups participated in the 'Remaking Rothesay' Charrette.
- Disparate bodies and agencies – which had not previously worked together – have collaborated for the greater good.
- Increased willingness among organisations and individuals to get involved and identify synergies and opportunities for partnership working.
- More than 30 monthly meetings of BIA.
- As the agreed coordinating body, the BIA received financial investment from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Argyll and Bute Council and others, as well as significant input in terms of advice and guidance.
- Initial funding, resources and knowledge exchanges, helped establish the BIA and raised its profile, both on the island and across Scotland.
- Mutually useful links were made through Bute and Cowal Community Planning Partnership, Clyde Island Group, Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative, Scottish Island Federation, Scotland's Rural Parliament
- Additional investment was welcomed from the Scottish Towns Partnership, and from Rothesay Townscape Heritage which has been the key delivery partner for much of the investment activity.
- There was a useful review of transport and accessibility to and on the island, with input from organisations including Calmac Ferries, the Community Cycling Group, Bute Conservation Trust, the Bute Ramblers Group, and Interloch Transport
- HIE invested in a feasibility study towards the development of a small scale manufacturing space and use of the Bank Enterprise Space was secured.

- BIA worked within a wider framework of regional and national policy for empowering and strengthening local communities, integrating Argyll and Bute Council's Outcome Improvement plan and the Scottish Government's National Policy Priorities.
- Important lessons in the practical realities of place based, community focused, cross sector regeneration have been shared through SURF's national and international networks via BIA participation in SURF events and publications.
- SURF initiated policy and practice learning visits from MSPs, Scottish Government officials, academic researchers and third sector representatives.
- The BIA has made valuable 'reality check' contributions (through the Alliance for Action programme) to policy and investment considerations on governance, land reform, and the engagement of heritage and creativity to support more authentic and inclusive community regeneration.

*"Getting people in the same room through the Alliance helped move things on so the funding and assistance from SURF was very welcome. [...] While progress is not where we would want it to be, we have a solid foundation for moving forward."*

## Barriers towards progress

### Local barriers:

Maintaining the original shared enthusiasm and momentum has been difficult.

Sustaining voluntary local capacity has been a problem. Enthusiastic individuals, who initially made a strong commitment, became overstretched. Changes in personnel and policy priorities among partners and stakeholders, were also debilitating in terms of cohesion and consistency of shared understanding and commitment.

Over time, and after the establishment of the BIA, the initial broad base of cross sector support narrowed and the core stakeholders/partners have had issues replacing, gaining and maintaining broader community and business support.

The extensive community engagement during the early days of the charrette and related surveys, was not translated into adequately shared and sustained action. That increased the burden on the remaining small core of volunteer stakeholders.

There have been concerns about duplication of effort and local projects overlapping. That may have reduced funding effectiveness and contributed to volunteer 'fatigue'.

Concerns have been raised about the BIA communication processes. SURF's review suggests that some of those concerns can be traced to those barrier issues above –

overstretched capacity, volunteer burn-out, etc. – and some to the failure to resolve long standing grievances between different parties.

### **External factors:**

It was strongly felt that the main barrier to progress on locally agreed goals, caused by wider external factors, had been insufficient revenue and capital spending to enable agreed actions to move forward.

The strength of relationships with external strategic partners had fluctuated, with some stakeholders feeling that higher level policy changes within agencies had left them less supported.

Some stakeholders identified a perceived contradiction in policy, which encouraged community enterprise and empowerment but failed to adequately invest in the revenue required either to build community capacity, or to resource relevant partners such as local authorities or economic development agencies, to do so.

*"External factors have raised significant finance, resources and galvanised local authority interest and resources – such as SURF, Scottish Towns Partnerships and Townscape Heritage initiatives."*

## **SURF and the BIA**

Views about the BIA model were broadly supportive, although there was frustration about the rate of progress and some concerns about the sustained commitment of all participants to the same vision. This may again reflect the historic disagreements between some of the stakeholders. Despite that, there was agreement that valuable foundations for further cooperation and activity had been laid.

The BIA model had contributed towards the local regeneration progress by enabling greater shared understanding, collaboration, a higher national profile, and encouraging greater investment and resources.

All agreed that there had been a degree of collaboration via the BIA which had not previously existed, but that it had not been sustained. Tangible progress was disappointingly slower than had been expected and desired.

Some stakeholders blamed levels of investment – especially inadequate core investment to support a full time coordinator. That exacerbated what some described as ‘volunteer fatigue’. It is also clear that personal circumstances, individual conflicts and the burden of responsibility falling on a reducing number of supporters had placed remaining volunteers under unsustainable pressure.

There were also some governance and administrative criticisms. There were difficulties in consistency with the role of the paid part-time coordinator, who resigned suddenly due to personal reasons and without a managed handover taking place.

The BIA’s relationship with SURF had facilitated valuable connections and learning transfer, both with other communities and with national funders, policymakers, politicians and third sector agencies.

There was a general consensus that SURF’s role had been useful and that it should continue to play a part in any future development.

SURF was described by stakeholders as having brought “considerable expertise and experience”. All agreed that it would be useful to continue working with SURF in some capacity and the shared preference was for SURF to continue with some kind of supporting role.

There were positive lessons learned in the development and operation of the BIA from the original Alliance for Action model.

The presence of an objective and respected, outsider body (SURF) was effective in encouraging active collaboration among individuals, groups and agencies in a shared community. The Alliance for Action model facilitated the linking of reality based local knowledge and experience with national networks, policies and resources for supporting community regeneration activity. SURF encouraged self confidence in the community by promoting respect for, and recognition of, the community’s existing essential assets in the form of local knowledge, skills and experience; consistent with the Scottish Government’s policy priority for community led regeneration. The BIA was encouraged to present its processes and experience to visiting policy makers and researchers and through SURF’s networks and national events. Transferable learning has usefully informed wider regeneration policy and practice

The most obvious difficulties – volunteer ‘burn-out’ and the lack of sustained core funding - reflect issues which have been highlighted elsewhere in SURF’s own

research and in recent findings from a trans-European study<sup>4</sup> in four cities and from the Scottish Government funded What Works Scotland programme<sup>5</sup>.

*"Although the results have been mixed, foundations have been laid for future activity"*

## WIDER LEARNING

### Lesson for SURF

#### **SURF's Alliance for Action work on Bute**

In supporting the development of the independent Bute Island Alliance organisation, out of the original Alliance for Action model, SURF was responding to the stated aims of stakeholders representing the active community. While SURF continued to support the BIA in a variety of ways – not least through funding a part-time 'facilitator' for twenty months – there were detrimental aspects to that evolved arrangement. Once the facilitator became directly managed by, and responsible to, the BIA steering group, in practical terms – and despite the introduction of measures to ameliorate this - SURF was not always adequately informed of developments, including problems and options for addressing them.

This led to some specific challenges, including a vagueness about priority activities and adequate, relevant reporting. Given the acknowledged importance of the community-led aspects of the programme, and SURF's recognition of the value of local knowledge and experience, there was a reluctance to push hard for more detailed or speedier updates. Agreed guidelines to ensure regular reporting were not always adhered to and SURF's understanding of group dynamics and pressures was 'filtered' through the understandable desire by BIA to present a relatively positive picture. The unusual 'arms' length' nature of SURF's role meant that SURF was not always adequately aware of tensions and stresses between BIA and the wider stakeholder partners.

On reflection, the agreed lines of governance and reporting should have been more resolutely imposed and the BIA might have benefited from closer engagement with SURF, and certainly by additional investment in finance and in kind. In terms of

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<sup>4</sup> Durose, C., Escobar, O., Gilchrist, A., Agger, A., Henderson, J., van Hulst, M., van Ostaijen, M. (2019) Socially smart cities: Making a difference in urban neighbourhoods University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.

<sup>5</sup> Christie, L., Gibb, K., Mcgregor, A., McTier, A., (2017) Economic Regeneration in Scotland: Past Lessons, What next? Current Practice, Future Challenges – A Report for What Works Scotland, [whatworksscotland.ac.uk](http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk)

learning for future practice within its wider Alliance for Action programme, without closely managed lines of activity and reporting, SURF would be unlikely to support this kind of semi-detached model again.

### **Lessons for local and national government and the wider SURF network**

The findings from SURF's Alliance for Action work on Bute reinforces learning from elsewhere in the Alliance for Action programme, its wider work and external research. The main message is that more dedicated and sustained financial and cross sector capacity building support will be essential if Scottish Government's current place-based initiatives are to successfully enable struggling communities to tackle deep rooted, and externally created, regeneration challenges.

The BIA members have contributed their hard won experience to a variety of events, designed to improve wider shared understanding of regeneration policy in practice. They have done so through SURF's ongoing programme of work for more intelligently linking practical local assets and initiatives with national and regional policy and resource considerations.

As noted elsewhere in this review, Bute stakeholders have contributed to national academic and policy research on land and asset ownership and management, governance, and the ways in which heritage and creativity can be used to further place based regeneration. They also participated in an assessment of the Rothesay Charrette as part of a Scottish Government evaluation of community led design initiatives.

BIA members have attended several Alliance for Action shared learning events with other Alliance sites and local authority and national policy makers, contributing to enhanced understanding of the impact of a variety of topics, including wellbeing and mental health and food poverty, on communities.

*"SURF's network and its events are great learning opportunities for wider island groups".*

### **WHAT NEXT?**

HIE has been a major funder of the Alliance work on Bute to date and will continue to support the community through its area team. Future funding from HIE will be limited to specific projects that can deliver tangible economic and social outcomes.

As the regional economic and community development agency, HIE will prioritise its activities and focus on maximising impact.

Rothesay Pavilion development is continuing apace and is committed to the broader regeneration of the whole community. It supports further joint actions and sees itself as a connector and ambassador to a regional and national audience.

Mount Stuart will continue to develop its strategy to deliver on its own charitable objectives, but will work in partnership to support development and regeneration across Bute.

Argyll & Bute Council is committed to the regeneration of Rothesay/Bute. It finds that the BIA has provided a solid foundation for moving forward through a Bute Business Improvement District (BID), the Rural Growth Deal or other forms of available Town Centre funding. The BIA has demonstrated that local people are ready to take action to secure a prosperous future for the island's residents and organisations.

The individual volunteers who have acted as BIA trustees continue to be committed to Rothesay and Bute's regeneration and to serving in a voluntary capacity to support that. The BIA will continue in its present form until at least November 2020 with the intention of ensuring that the Enterprise Space remains a place of opportunity for support and collaborative working. Given the pressure on the remaining volunteer trustees, a longer term future for the BIA seems unlikely.

## OPTIONS FOR SURF

Whether or not, the BIA continues after November, 2020, SURF's formal facilitating and supporting role on Bute, as an element of its wider Alliance for Action programme, is approaching a natural end. However, there have been representations from stakeholders that SURF should continue to offer support and advice in its role as a national forum and network and linking agency.

In addition to that standard support role, SURF has been liaising with Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) in exploring the development of Rothesay/Bute as one of Scotland's Improvement Districts (SID).<sup>6</sup> It was agreed by all partners that such a

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<sup>6</sup> As of 2019 SIDs is the new name for what was previously the Scottish Government programme BIDs (Business Improvement Districts). The name change reflects a change in strategy in recognition that more than 'business' has to improve in order to support successful regeneration. By pooling and sharing resources, local businesses, working with other private, public and third sector partners, take a leading role in improving local

body could carry forward some of the main economic priorities identified and developed via the Alliance for Action approach and BIA's subsequent business plan. The first open public meeting to discuss the potential for the development of a Bute Improvement District was held in January, 2020. SURF already enjoys close partnership links with the STP in its Scotland-wide work.

If invited to do so, SURF would be pleased to support the development of the Bute Improvement District. Its role, alongside BIA volunteers, could be to promote connections and activities beyond economic, business and entrepreneurial skills areas, to additionally address improvements in community, social and wellbeing.

It has also been suggested that SURF could be involved in supporting the setting up of a Community Development Trust, which could work alongside a Bute Improvement District

In any circumstance, SURF – in its role as Scotland's Regeneration Forum - would expect to continue in a supportive, connective and positive relationship with the many agencies, individuals and third sector and public sector bodies which have been part of the ongoing regeneration work.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

SURF's view is that, given the pressure on volunteers and funding, it is likely that the formally constituted Bute Island Alliance will come to an end this year (2020). Individual stakeholders remain committed to working collaboratively towards their vision of a regenerated Rothesay and wider island, but favour a move towards working with the development of a Bute Scotland Improvement District.

Participants in the review agreed that their preferred option is for SURF to continue its involvement on Bute in some form.

As referred to earlier, SURF has already begun working with Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) towards the creation of a Bute Scotland Improvement District. SURF's recommendation would be that SURF specifically supports the BIA partners in engaging with that process as a way of encouraging any Improvement District to expand beyond 'business boundaries' to the Island's broader community. The BIA and the STP have stated that they would each welcome SURF's involvement in this process.

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economic conditions by delivering an agreed package of investment and initiatives over and beyond that delivered by local and national government.

The STP and individual agencies on Bute are already members of SURF and as such would continue to benefit from the intelligent linking, and positive collaborations promoted through SURF's national regeneration network.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SURF would like to acknowledge, and express appreciation for, the shared time and effort of all those agencies and individuals that have participated in the work of SURF's Alliance for Action and the subsequent efforts of the BIA towards broader and more collaborative regeneration across Rothesay and Bute.

As originally envisaged in the conception of its Alliance for Action programme, SURF has been able to draw out valuable lessons from the complex and shifting, reality-based challenges and successes of that work. Through SURF's various networks and channels of communication, that learning has been used to better inform local and national regeneration policy and practice across Scotland.

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SURF Scotland's Regeneration Forum. Orkney Street Enterprise Centre, 18-20 Orkney Street, Glasgow G51 2BX  
Tel: 0141 440 0122 / Email: [info@surf.scot](mailto:info@surf.scot) / Website: [www.surf.scot](http://www.surf.scot)

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Supported by: Aberdeen City Council, Creative Scotland, Dundee Partnership, Glasgow City Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Museums Galleries Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and Wheatley Group.