



# WELLBEING ECONOMY ALLIANCE

## **WEAll Briefings: Little Summaries of Big Issues**

**‘With your support we kept going, what else were we to do?’**

**Linwood as a microcosm of the beginnings of a wellbeing economy**

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## Introduction

For any new idea to be supported, let alone adopted, it needs to be visualised.

Sometimes that is via story telling that offers a coherent and compelling narrative. Sometimes that will be by seeing the idea played out in practice and getting a sense of what it looks and feels like.

Ideally, it will be both.

This applies to the diverse movement working to build a wellbeing economy: we need to work upwards from practical experience and outwards from conversations that open up people's sense of the possibility that the economy can operate for, rather than against, humanity.

Rarely though (under the current economic system), is it possible to see the richness of an idea embodied in so many dimensions in one place. Fortunately, in Linwood, a town of just over ten thousand people on the outskirts of Glasgow in the United Kingdom, efforts to build what can be described as a wellbeing economy can be seen in action. The Linwood story encompasses not just what a wellbeing economy might entail, but also why a such a new economic model *needs* to be built, in Linwood and beyond.

In many ways, the story of Linwood reflects the story of the global economy. It has powerful actors in the form of corporate and institutional protagonists. And it has those who suffer from an economic model misaligned with what people need: local families who just want to get on with their lives and buy produce locally, play football on local pitches, share a cup of coffee together in a local cafe, and feel that the economy with which they interact is working for them.

The characters in Linwood's story include heroic women fighting against an impersonal bureaucracy. It has heartache and triumphs, and its long history is still ongoing with the possibility of another instalment just around the corner.

Rather than telling the story of Linwood in a chronological sense, its story of the last few decades is set out here via challenges and objectives that will be familiar to those in the wellbeing economy movement around the world:

- Deep systemic causes beyond the manifest symptoms
- Local perseverance in resisting an imposed and inappropriate agenda, but so often coming up against power and system intransigence
- The cultivation of business models that are designed for social benefit
- Bottom up economic development; and
- A bold new vision for how the economy can operate.

Together, the story of Linwood provides hope that a wellbeing economy can be built in the face of system resistance, by a few determined people with their eyes set on an economy that works for them.

## Root(e) causes

Linwood's economy has long been in flux. It was once largely reliant on one employer. Over fifty years ago the Rootes Factory was built to produce 'Hillman Imp' cars – industrialising an area once home to mining and chemicals, flax and cotton production. Production expanded and associated businesses developed. To accommodate the workforce the village of Linwood grew, with many new residents coming from nearby Glasgow. Soon, Scotland's largest shopping centre – the first regional shopping centre in Scotland – was opened in Linwood's town centre.

Just a few decades later, in the 1980s, mirroring the experience of other industrial centres, across the west of Scotland and the UK writ large, the factory shut down.

As happened with factory closures elsewhere, Linwood was left with empty buildings and land was left contaminated (this is also a legacy of the economic activity pre-dating Rootes). Huge numbers of people were left without work – according to the land scholar Andy Wightman, six thousand direct jobs were lost and it is estimated that another seven thousand related jobs in the wider economy disappeared.<sup>2</sup> This spurred decline of the local economy and decline of the population as people moved away from Linwood to seek work elsewhere, many migrating to Canada. It also spurred the decline of local facilities as falling population meant school closures and deterioration of public infrastructure.

By 2001, what had been hailed as "Scotland's largest shopping centre" in Linwood's town centre was struggling. The lease was taken on by a group called Balmore Properties Ltd for £1.7 million<sup>3</sup> – but no investment nor reinvigoration followed. Instead the space where the Linwood community once congregated was allowed to deteriorate further as shop tenants were evicted and leases were not extended.<sup>4</sup> Community frustration led to a petition organised in 2006 by the local Member of the Scottish Parliament to end Balmore's tenure. Half of Linwood's residents put their names to it.<sup>5</sup> The Linwood Community Development Trust later explained that this was a time of 'a crumbling shopping centre, unkempt roads and verges. A backdrop which did not reflect the spirit of the Linwood people'.<sup>6</sup>

So, it was perhaps unsurprising that Tesco – the huge supermarket firm that at the time dominated the UK retail scene – was welcomed when it took over the

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.andywightman.com/?p=2475>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.scotsman.com/news-2-15012/new-tesco-town-row-as-secret-land-deal-revealed-1-807995> (also available here: [http://www.andywightman.com/docs/scotsman\\_20100901.pdf](http://www.andywightman.com/docs/scotsman_20100901.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/news-2-15012/new-tesco-town-row-as-secret-land-deal-revealed-1-807995>

<sup>5</sup> Reported in <http://www.andywightman.com/archives/2475>

<sup>6</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

town centre lease in mid 2007. Little known then was that Balmore was part of the Tesco ownership network.<sup>7</sup>

By then government regeneration efforts had begun. In post-industrial areas lacking local economic energy, disconnected from the financialised commercial and lifestyle glitter of nearby cities, regeneration tended to be translated as physical transformation. Such initiatives embodied a faith in trickle-down economics<sup>8</sup> and often bore little resemblance to what the people living in these areas actually needed. Kirsty Flannigan, Manager of the Linwood Community Development Trust, explained that '[such] regeneration projects – that have focussed on physical assets – have failed Linwood in the longer term'.<sup>9</sup> They also failed Linwood because they brought little in: instead of being the focus of regeneration investment, Linwood became an island of disinvestment in a sea of investment as infrastructure projects (large drive-to shopping centres, an airport campus and a light industrial estate) sprung up nearby.

As the purported community regeneration plans unfolded in the years following, it became clear that they were not aligned with community needs or wishes. The key plank of the plans was a Tesco store with new retail outlets and a new sports complex, the plans for which gave little cause to hope they would be something local people could make use of. As one local resident reflected later: 'people of Linwood need somewhere that all the community can come together...When the community centre that we did have was demolished to make way for the new sports complex it left our community with nowhere to go'.<sup>10</sup>

Economic transformation was coming to Linwood. But it was hardly in the form local people wanted. Perhaps worse, they were excluded from much of the promised economic benefits and their voices ignored in much decision making. What happened seems to be a case of exogenous agenda setting and extractive economic dynamics that tapped the economic exchanges that did exist, and which sapped the energy and interactions of local people.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://www.bridgingandcommercial.co.uk/article-desc-1197\\_tesco-under-fire-again-for-hiding-behind-property-agents](https://www.bridgingandcommercial.co.uk/article-desc-1197_tesco-under-fire-again-for-hiding-behind-property-agents)

<sup>8</sup> Scott, G. (2012) Regeneration policy and equalities issues. In Mooney, G. and Scott, G. (eds.), *Social Justice and Social Policy in Scotland*. Bristol: Policy Press. 81-96

<sup>9</sup> Flannigan, Kirsty writing for <http://www.andywightman.com/archives/2524>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

## Resistance and perseverance

Unlike other places where an economic agenda set elsewhere and by others has undermined local livelihoods, in Linwood a group of residents fought back.

The Linwood Community Development Trust (LCDT) 'was formed by a group from the local community, who want to improve health and wellbeing, reduce social inequalities and build social capital within Linwood'.<sup>11</sup> Their work has come to encompass galvanising bottom up economic development, delivery of locally-relevant facilities, and reinvigoration of the community itself.

LCDT, with little funding, carried out extensive consultations with local residents and from these drew up plans for projects that seek to 'address issues which local residents identified as being important'.<sup>12</sup> LCDT explains that this process 'began a community campaign to get the eyesore of the old shopping Centre demolished'.<sup>13</sup>

Today, LCDT is a close to £2 million turnover venture. Its projects include a £1.5 million project underway to build a community owned village ('Mossedghe') comprising an all-weather football pitch, centre, theatre, and café. It runs the Roots of Linwood Grocers, Linwood in Bloom, (which has brightened the Linwood streets with over eighty planters), a community choir that has been singing together for over five years, and the Kit & Caboodle football kit washing enterprise.

This work has happened only due to the energy of a small group of local people – six women, with backing of the local community – fighting for their vision of a community-led local economy. As one reflects 'With your [the community's] support we kept going, what else were we to do?'.<sup>14</sup> Some of the women have since become paid staff, with LCDT controlled by local residents and its Board comprised of Linwood women.

The wider engagement in the objectives of LCDT is evident in online petitions (for example criticising the news that LCDT had a bid to the Lottery turned down) or the slew of emails protesting a statement from a local official that the community deemed problematic. The work of LCDT and the boost this local support gives the momentum meant that the story of Linwood was being reoriented to one written by its people. LCDT 'consulted with the Linwood community as to what they needed for their community, we then took stock and identified what we could deliver'.<sup>15</sup> This was a two year process and involved over 2500 people, with more detailed plans then being shared, including via nine community discussions to check back with local residents. In total, for over ten years LCDT has worked to

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.linwoodtrust.org.uk/content/about/> (accessed February 13, 2020)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.linwoodtrust.org.uk/content/history/> (accessed February 13, 2020)

<sup>13</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>14</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>15</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

ensure the direction of travel was right and that local people had opportunities to make changes to the original direction if they felt it was needed.<sup>16</sup> As Kirsty Flannigan, reported in the Glasgow Herald newspaper, said:

*‘What started as a campaign against the loss of the community centre and to improve the town centre, galvanised the community. It made us understand we had a right to challenge. This started with a group of ordinary working mums who didn’t like seeing the community left as it was and wanted better for their children.’<sup>17</sup>*

Eventually LCDT has been able to obtain development and financial support from the Scottish Government and from the local Renfrewshire Council. But this has been a long time coming and required resilience in the *persistence* sense of the word. As Kirsty Flannigan states, in the face of several funding knock backs, they carried on.<sup>18</sup> Their biggest project is the construction of the Mossedge Village with its cafes, football pitch, theatre and park. Getting to the point of breaking ground has been:

*‘...a roller coaster ride of highs, lows and we have nearly fallen off at times. At the beginning of 2018 we thought we had lost the funding for the project. We stayed with it...Staying power kept us going through these rough patches.’<sup>19</sup>*

Flannigan looks back at the experience and sees the signs that the Mossedge Village is beginning to be built as reason to take heart: they are determined to make the Linwood economy work for the Linwood Community and the Mossedge Village is a symbol of this determination.

<sup>16</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/16145542.mothers-lead-fight-to-transform-derelict-school-into-24m-village/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/trust-launches-astonishing-attack-on-lottery#urlt0081us177CSc.99>

<sup>19</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

## Power and system intransigence

All this work and persistence has been in the face of recalcitrance by many of those in a position of power in relation to Linwood's economic development. From the outset, LCDT sought meetings with local politicians, but they were hard to secure. When meetings were arranged, LCDT leaders report those across the table from them being overbearing and intimidating. The women leading LCDT 'admit to being reduced to tears after meetings with bureaucrats and council leaders [leaving] them feeling worthless'.<sup>20</sup> Flannigan explains that 'we saw the 'suits' as 'cosmic bureaucrats' living on another planet. It was a case of them doing it 'to us', instead of 'with us'.<sup>21</sup>

What LCDT were seeking to do was ensure that the investment and economic development of their local area headed in a direction that was aligned with local needs and wishes. There were substantial and well-funded regeneration programmes being deployed in the area: including the construction of the £24 million pound sports facility and the multi-million pound development by Tesco.<sup>22</sup> Yet when the group of local women sought to input to the design and vision of these initiatives they report being 'ignored, disempowered and on many occasions made to feel inferior by those in power'.<sup>23</sup> Jim Boyle, a long-term advisor to the LCDT, refers to the experience as a case of powerful actors lining up against change. The Linwood experience is hardly unusual: so often, when an established system is resisted, it seeks to reassert itself.<sup>24</sup>

Less dramatic has been the 'dead hand' of official disinterest. LCDT has been working to boost the Linwood economy through its suite of local businesses, but when it comes to agencies using these businesses, it seems, in Jim Boyle's words, that they 'cannae be bothered'. Rather than any laws or policies hindering their use of LCDT businesses, this appears to be a case of a simple lack of effort to direct spending towards these fledgling local initiatives. It wasn't just local government bodies that didn't sidle up to support LCDT businesses: other significant local entities are also conspicuous by their absence on the order books of LCDT businesses.

<sup>20</sup> <https://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/linwood-groups-supermarket-sweep> 19th October 2014 by Robert Armour

<sup>21</sup> Flannigan, Kirsty writing for <http://www.andywrightman.com/archives/2524>

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.cladglobal.com/CLADnews/architecture-design/£24m-leisure-centre-opens-in-Linwood,-Scotland/305343?source=news> and <https://paisley.is/live/linwood/>

<sup>23</sup> Flannigan, Kirsty writing for <http://www.andywrightman.com/archives/2524>

<sup>24</sup> See, for example: Gopel, Maja 2016 *The Great Mindshift: How a New Economic Paradigm and Sustainability Transformations go Hand in Hand*, Springer Open and Wuppertal Institut, Berlin



## New models of ownership, the foundational economy and community wealth building

LCDT's vision in part amounts to a bottom-up model of economic development – one that is designed deliberately and concertedly to serve the people of Linwood.

This has encompassed building of the community-owned all-weather football pitch and trying to secure the transfer of the site of a school and associated 10 acres of woodland. On the site will be a community facility and café – the Mossedge Village – owned and run by locals as a place for them, to work, play, meet, organise, eat and sing. Income derived from these activities will be re-invested back into Linwood. Alongside LCDT's other existing businesses, these initiatives generate local employment and meet local needs – aligning the outcomes of the economy with what people value.<sup>25</sup> Even before it opens, local parents are showing their children the future football pitch with promises to kick a football around on it together.

LCDT's scope to secure the land on which to develop these enterprises was bolstered by the Scottish *Community Empowerment Act*<sup>26</sup> and other land reform measures that enable communities to take over land which otherwise been likely have been out of reach. It was a result of the Scottish Government's 'Pockets and Prospects Investment' fund that LCDT was able to recruit posts to develop a grocery business – 'Roots' – which has expanded over the last year, since adding two new staff and an additional delivery van. While this can be seen as a case of government usefully investing in community-led economic activity, the ongoing success of the various LCDT projects now needs public agencies and others to procure locally – from locals, for locals.

LCDT's suite of small businesses underpin an effort to 'capture the Linwood pound' and maintain its circulation locally. LCDT's approach reflects the mounting evidence from the US and the UK<sup>27</sup> that via local provision, local ownership, the use of anchor institutions, and procuring locally matters to economic fortunes of an area. This is about keeping financial flows local and generating bottom up economic development with the benefits retained locally, reinforcing virtuous circles. As LCDT explains, this 'means finding creative ways of offering a community owned substitute services and goods'.<sup>28</sup> In other words, diverting money that people would have spent anyway on, say, fruit and vegetables so that instead of the surplus leaving Linwood, it is retained by the community owned grocer (Roots) and the surplus reinvested in Linwood.<sup>29</sup> As Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>25</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/>

<sup>27</sup> See, for example: <https://foundationaleconomy.com/introduction/>; <https://cles.org.uk/tag/the-preston-model/>; <https://democracycollaborative.org/content/case-community-wealth-building>; <https://ilsr.org/building-local-power/>

<sup>28</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>29</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

explains, such approaches to local economic development that is community up rather than waiting for trickle down are not about finding 'a golden nugget, [they're] not sexy, just sensible'.<sup>30</sup>

The scope for such local procurement is growing: local customers such as Bridge of Weir Leather Company (part of the Scottish Leather Group) buys from LCDT and students and their support teams from Riverbrae school regularly come to the Roots shop for their fruit. In fact, 'Roots is now supplying quality fruit and veg across [the region] ... and [there's been] an increase in business with the larger companies in Renfrewshire'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>31</sup> LCDD: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

## New purpose: community-led

Beyond the economy itself, what LCDT are doing constitutes a turning of the tables of power and agenda setting. It is putting the community in the driving seat of the purpose and functioning of local economy, as architects of their future rather than passive recipients of the result of decisions taken elsewhere without their interests at heart. While the LCDT's agreed community plan has been preserved and the support of the local community for their work has grown, Kirsty Flannigan points out this has been during a period of external political flux: five UK prime ministers, three different council leaders, and two different CEOs of the Renfrewshire Council. It is a period of a major banking collapse, an economic recession and the suite of bailouts and reactive policies that resulted. External forces will continue to create uncertainty: at the time of writing, the world is in the grip of the coronavirus pandemic, which will have profound consequences on economies and societies into the future. Talking about community resilience has never been more salient.

A reflection of the extent to which they have been successful in ensuring local needs remain at the fore in the face of such external turbulence is that in January 2018 LCDT signed an agreement between Renfrewshire Council and the LCDT, with the Leader of Renfrewshire Council as signatory. This identified LCDT's activities as key pieces of work which the Council will help to advance – with Renfrewshire Council agreeing to enter into a Strategic Partnership Agreement with LCDT to deliver the ongoing Mossedge Village development, one of the core pillars of the LCDT portfolio. The challenge now, is going from agreement to action.

LCDT's vision for power sharing is also reflected in how LCDT itself is organised – over 1500 members working towards 'a flat line management structure, with a management team taking forward the priorities of Mossedge. LCDT and the trading companies will move to a cooperative model by 2022'.<sup>32</sup> They want to embody themselves the way they want to transform the community, one:

*'...based on the social, environmental and economic rights of people and their direct participation in the decisions affecting their individual and collective rights...A self-empowering approach, on an individual and collective level, we believe, will lead to the transformation of people and place. We aim to satisfy the needs of people in Linwood across the generations.'<sup>33</sup>*

At Mossedge Village the delivery team, for example, is tasked with working to pursue preventative and intergenerational, collaborative goals.<sup>34</sup> LCDT lives its policies – for example, no zero hour contracts will be issued by LCDT businesses

<sup>32</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>33</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>34</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

and they are an accredited Living Wage employer that encourages other organisations and their suppliers to pay the Living Wage.

## Conclusion: hope

Linwood is an area that shows the that workings of today's economic system result in communities being abandoned when something or somewhere no longer makes sense in profit terms. So often in today's economic system corporate power rules the day with political actors falling into line.

In contrast, the work of LCDT is a window to how a wellbeing economy might operate and the change it can bring: of concertedly getting the economy to serve the people. Their success to date is already demonstrating that when the economy is repurposed, the community benefits:

*'We decided – no more waiting for policy changes, no more waiting for public bodies to agree with what our communities were wanting to change. We want communities at the table with the information and the support they need, at a time when they need it. It is about levelling the playing field.'*<sup>35</sup>

The energy sparked by a few people standing up for themselves and their community has gone beyond simply being resilient to the winds that blow in from outside. The Linwood story is about building a new economic system and doing so in a way that prefigures long term transformation. It has been observed by a local resident that 'as a community we've pulled together this far...our grandchildren can benefit [and] that's a plus.<sup>36</sup> Another has said: 'The heart of Linwood has started to beat again'.<sup>37</sup>

That's what a wellbeing economy is all about – putting heart back into the economy.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in <https://thirdforcenews.org.uk/tfn-news/linwood-groups-supermarket-sweep> 19th October 2014 by Robert Armour

<sup>36</sup> Cited in LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan

<sup>37</sup> LCDT: Direction of Travel 2020 TO 2025 Prepared by: Jim Boyle and Kirsty Flannigan