

Leading Sustainability and Regeneration in Projects¹

From sustaining to regenerating: community development as partnership²



Figure 1 The garden outlives the gardener – if someone is charged to tend it

Abstract

The title of this series promises both sustainability and regeneration, yet the difference between the two has so far been left implicit. This article makes it explicit. Sustainability seeks to do less harm and to persist; regeneration seeks a net-positive contribution that builds the capacity of social and ecological systems to keep renewing themselves. Community development is the clearest test of that distinction, because the community is not a by-product of the project – it is the asset being changed. The article argues that regeneration is a design and governance choice made during the project, even though its value accrues for decades after handover. The decisive question is therefore one of stewardship: who holds the asset, and under what arrangement, once

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²How to cite this work: Minney, H. (2026). *From sustaining to regenerating: community development as partnership, Leading Sustainability and Regeneration in Projects, series article, PM World Journal, Volume XV, Issue VII, July.*

the project team has gone? Drawing on four named cases – London CLT at St Clements, the Big Local programme, Granby Four Streets in Toxteth, and Vauban in Freiburg – the article shows how the five Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership) are braided together in a single place, and why Partnership is the pillar that makes the others endure. It takes the opportunity to align the series with the United Nations’ internationally recognised vocabulary, while retaining the one analytical refinement that earns its place: splitting People into Community and Wellbeing.

Keywords: *Regeneration, Community Development, Community Land Trust, Stewardship, Partnership, Positive Peace, Social Value, Benefits Ownership, Five Ps, Place-based regeneration.*

Introduction: when the place is the project

Across this series we have examined sustainability through the sectors that project professionals recognise: construction and the built environment, energy and infrastructure, and most recently the data centres that anchor our digital ambitions ([Minney 2026c, 2026b](#)). In each, the community was present but adjacent – a stakeholder to be engaged, a recipient of social value, a holder of the social licence to operate. Community development projects invert that relationship. Here the community is not adjacent to the asset; it is the asset. The thing being changed is the place itself and the people who live in it, and they are simultaneously the client, the beneficiary, and – if the project is designed well – the eventual owner.

That inversion makes community development the truest test of regeneration. It is comparatively easy to claim a regenerative outcome for a building that produces more energy than it consumes, because the measurement is contained and the asset is inert. A neighbourhood is harder, and more revealing, because it keeps living after the project closes. Whatever we build into it – or fail to build into it – compounds. This article is therefore where the second half of the series title finally has to earn its keep. We have written a great deal about sustaining. We now have to say what regenerating means, and show that a project can deliver it.

A working scope is needed, because “community development” can be stretched until it means nothing. In this article it means place-based projects in which residents are intended to be co-owners of the outcome: community-led housing, neighbourhood regeneration, and the renewal of derelict or decommissioned places into living communities. We deliberately set aside the mechanics that earlier articles have already covered – participatory engagement and the social licence to operate ([Minney 2025c](#)), the multiplier effects and value-maturity tools of inclusive prosperity ([Minney 2026a](#)) – and refer back to them rather than repeat them. We also cede community energy schemes to the forthcoming article on energy generation and distribution, where they belong.

A note on terminology: from four pillars to the five Ps

Earlier articles in this series used a four-pillar model of sustainability: Environmental, Economic, Community, and Human Wellbeing ([Minney 2025b](#)). That decomposition was deliberately

project-facing. It took the three Ps that most people already recognise – People, Planet and Prosperity – and split People into two, because a project influences individuals and communities through different levers and measures them in different ways. The model served its purpose. But as the argument has matured, it has become clear that better communication is served by adopting the United Nations’ own vocabulary, the five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership ([UN 2015](#)). This is not a correction so much as a homecoming. The five Ps are internationally recognised, they travel across audiences without translation, and they make explicit two dimensions – Peace and Partnership – that the four-pillar model left implicit.

We retain the one refinement that earns its place: People still splits into Community and Wellbeing, because the priority demands it and because a project governs and measures the flourishing of individuals differently from the flourishing of the communities they form. The reader will notice that this article is where Peace and Partnership stop being abstractions. Community development is precisely the domain in which Partnership – co-ownership, stewardship, and multi-actor governance – becomes load-bearing, and in which Peace, in the local and structural sense of cohesion and stability, becomes a measurable outcome rather than a pious hope. The fuller economic case for Peace as an investment has been set out elsewhere ([Minney 2025a](#)); here we meet it at the scale of a single street.

Regeneration is not strong sustainability³

It is tempting to treat regeneration as merely an ambitious form of sustainability – sustainability with the dial turned up. That framing is comfortable and wrong. The two ideas sit on a trajectory, but they point in different directions.

Sustainability, in its canonical Brundtland sense, is about meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs ([WCED 1987](#)). In practice this manifests as efficiency and harm reduction: use less, waste less, pollute less, persist. Reed ([2007](#)) mapped this onto a trajectory of design intent that runs from degenerative practice, through a neutral or “sustainable” point at which a development does no net harm, towards regenerative practice, at which a development makes a net-positive contribution to the living systems it sits within. The distinction is not rhetorical. A sustainable neighbourhood aims to tread lightly; a regenerative one aims to leave the social and ecological fabric measurably healthier than it found it, and – crucially – more able to renew itself without further intervention ([du Plessis 2012](#); [Mang and Reed 2012](#)).

For a project professional the operative word is capacity. Regeneration is not a bigger output; it is the building of a system’s capacity to keep producing good outcomes after we leave. This is why

³ Although there are terms “strong sustainability” and “weak sustainability”, I did not intend to use them in this article. For reference, “weak sustainability” contends that it is allowable to substitute human-made capital, or even financial wealth, for natural capital, whereas “strong sustainability” contends that nothing can substitute for natural capital. It is the latter that aligns with the author’s beliefs.

it belongs in a discussion of community development rather than, say, of materials. A low-carbon material is a better input. A community that has gained the capability, the assets, and the governance to keep improving its own circumstances is a regenerated system.



Figure 2 From doing less harm to doing more good – the regeneration trajectory (after Reed 2007)

Answering the sceptic: regeneration without the mysticism

An experienced and sceptical reader will object that “regenerative” has no agreed definition, no legal status, and a worrying tendency to be co-opted as a marketing word. Vague words are dangerous precisely because they can be claimed by anyone. The answer is not to abandon the concept but to make it testable.

We already have the test. An earlier article in this series established the discipline of additionality – the net change that would not have occurred without the project, measured against the total change ([Minney 2025c](#)). Regeneration, defined operationally, is simply additionality that continues to compound after handover rather than decaying once the project team disperses. A sustainable intervention holds a line against decline; a regenerative one bends the curve upward and hands someone the means to keep it bending. That is measurable, it is falsifiable, and it does not require an ecological worldview to verify – only a baseline, a steward, and the patience to measure over years rather than at project completion.

Nor is it true that regeneration has no legal standing. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is, in effect, regeneration legislated. It places a statutory duty on forty-four public bodies to pursue seven well-being goals – among them a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a more equal Wales, and a Wales of cohesive communities – and to do so in accordance with a sustainable development principle expressed as five ways of working: long-term thinking, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement ([Welsh Government 2015](#)). A Future Generations Commissioner holds those bodies to account. For our purposes the Act is doubly useful: it demonstrates that a government can give regenerative intent legal teeth, and its five ways of working map almost exactly onto the argument of this article. Integration is the braiding of the Ps; collaboration and involvement are Partnership; long-term thinking is the stewardship problem to which we now turn.

Partnership in action: the stewardship problem

The classic project lifecycle ends at handover. We define scope, mobilise, deliver, transition into use, and close. For most of what project professionals do, that is the correct shape. For a regenerative community outcome it is exactly the wrong shape, because the outcome only begins at the point where the lifecycle ends. The value of a regenerated neighbourhood is realised over the thirty, fifty or hundred years in which it either keeps renewing itself or quietly slides back. The single most consequential decision in a community development project is therefore not a delivery decision at all. It is a governance decision: who will own and steward this asset for the decades that matter, and under what arrangement?

This is where the Partnership pillar becomes load-bearing, and it is the reason Partnership cannot be relegated to a footnote in a community article. Partnership here does not mean the contractual partnering of a delivery consortium. It means the durable, multi-actor arrangement – a trust, a community benefit society, a development corporation, a statutory board – into whose hands the project deliberately places long-term ownership, so that the benefit has an owner who outlives the project. In benefits-management terms, the benefit owner must survive handover; if it does not, the benefits realisation plan is a fiction ([Minney 2025b](#)).

The community development sector has evolved a family of vehicles for exactly this purpose. The Community Land Trust is the clearest. A CLT holds land or housing in trust for a defined community in perpetuity, separating the value of the land from the value of the building so that affordability can be locked in for every future occupant rather than captured by the first lucky buyer. Development trusts, community benefit societies, and asset-transfer arrangements with local authorities perform analogous roles. What they share is the deliberate creation of a steward – an institution charged with tending the asset long after the project that created it has closed its accounts.

Patient capital, and the evidence that it works

Stewardship is necessary but not sufficient. The steward needs resources, and – more unusually – it needs them over a horizon that conventional funding rarely tolerates. The strongest UK evidence for the value of patient, resident-controlled investment comes from the Big Local programme, the largest community-led regeneration initiative in the country, in which around 150 neighbourhoods each received approximately one million pounds of National Lottery funding to spend over ten to fifteen years, under resident control, with minimal restriction on what it could be spent on.

In July 2025 Local Trust, with 3ni, Shared Intelligence and OCSI, published *Everybody Needs Good Neighbourhoods 2*, the first study of its kind to compare these areas with twenty-nine similarly deprived neighbourhoods that had no neighbourhood-led initiative, over a fifteen-year period ([Local Trust et al. 2025](#)). The findings are statistically significant and directly relevant to the argument of this article. Areas with neighbourhood-led initiatives saw local business units grow by forty-one per cent, against twenty-two per cent in the comparison areas. Between 2014 and 2021 the proportion of children in low-income households rose by 5.5 percentage points in the initiative areas, against eight points in comparable areas – local action did not reverse a

national trend, but it measurably softened it. And overall crime fell by 19.1 offences per thousand people in the initiative areas, against 10.5 in the comparators.

That last figure deserves emphasis, because it is Peace with a number attached. In the IEP's vocabulary, positive peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful, functioning societies ([IEP 2021](#); [Minney 2025a](#)). At the scale of a neighbourhood, those structures are precisely what resident-led regeneration builds: functioning local institutions, trust between neighbours, and the collective efficacy that keeps streets safe. The crime reduction and the economic gains are consequences of the same phenomenon; regeneration that builds local capacity builds local Peace, and the evidence now exists to say so.



Figure 3 The iron triangle stops at handover; the regenerative benefit does not – so someone must be charged to hold it

Braiding the Ps: four places, one skill

In a community development project no single P can be optimised in isolation, because they are realised in the same place at the same time and constantly trade against one another. The real skill is integration – the deliberate combining of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership into a coherent whole. The four cases that follow are chosen because each demonstrates this under different conditions, and because each carries both verified outcome data and an honest trade-off.

St Clements, Mile End: stewardship written into the lease

St Clements is a Grade II-listed former psychiatric hospital in Tower Hamlets, redeveloped into 252 homes, of which 23 are held by London CLT – the first urban Community Land Trust in the United Kingdom. The decisive design choice was structural rather than architectural. The resale price of each CLT home is tied by lease and section 106 agreement to local median incomes, so

that the homes sell on at roughly a third to a half of open-market value, in perpetuity ([London CLT 2024](#); [Wrigleys N.D.](#)). The trust is a community benefit society in which any Londoner can buy a one-pound share and vote. The first families moved in during 2017; in 2024 a resale demonstrated that the affordability lock actually holds when tested. Demand evidence is informative: more than seven hundred households applied for twenty-three homes.

What St Clements proves is that Partnership and stewardship are legal-structural choices made during the project, not expressions of goodwill bolted on afterwards. However there's a trade-off. CLT owners accept a diminished financial return on resale; perpetual affordability is purchased by giving up the speculative gain that ordinary ownership confers.

Big Local: what patient, resident-led funding produces

The Big Local evidence has already been set out above as the empirical anchor for stewardship and Peace. Its place in the braid is to demonstrate the Prosperity and Peace strands at neighbourhood scale – faster business growth, softened child poverty, sharper crime reduction – under the specific conditions of long-term, flexible, resident-controlled funding ([Local Trust et al. 2025](#)). It is the case that most cleanly isolates the variable that matters: not how much was spent, but who controlled it and for how long.

Unfortunately, as we'll discuss in failure modes below, Local Trust has announced its own closure during the 2026/27 financial year. Even the flagship programme is, by design, time-limited.

Granby Four Streets: regeneration as the cure for “regeneration”

The Granby Four Streets in Toxteth, Liverpool, are four streets of terraced houses built around 1900 and left derelict after decades of top-down planning and projects that scattered the once-thriving, ethnically diverse community. These plans followed the 1981 unrest, but were ill-thought through. The case matters to this article because it embodies the regeneration-versus-sustainability distinction in built form: it is the renewal of a place that earlier, extractive “regeneration” had degraded. Residents formed a Community Land Trust in 2011; the council transferred properties to it between 2012 and 2014; and the architecture collective Assemble, working with the CLT, renovated the homes and established the Granby Workshop social enterprise. Five homes were sold at income-linked prices and six retained for social rent ([World Habitat 2016](#); [Granby Four Streets CLT 2021](#)), with two more converted to a Winter Garden.

In 2015 Assemble won the Turner Prize for the work – the first time the award had gone to a collective – and insisted that it be shared with the CLT, an emblem of Partnership that is hard to improve upon. Crucially for a peer-reviewed audience, the project has been independently evaluated by NatCen Social Research and WPI Economics for Power to Change, so the outcomes can be cited as assessed rather than self-reported ([Power to Change 2017](#)). The renewal catalysed neighbouring renovation by Plus Dane, Liverpool Mutual Homes and a local housing co-operative, and it changed Liverpool City Council's own approach to engaging communities – an institutional, positive peace effect that outlasts the ten houses themselves.

Once again, there are trade-offs. Derelict shops remain un-renovated for want of funds, and a new-build proposal on Ducie Street has had to navigate the tension between growth and the community’s own preferences. Regeneration here is slow, partial, and contingent on funding that arrives in fragments. That is not a weakness of the case; it is the texture of the real thing.

Vauban, Freiburg: what wholehearted regeneration looks like

Our cases so far have been British; it’s always instructive to include an international example. Vauban is a district of Freiburg in Germany, built on a decommissioned French military barracks that closed in 1990 – a decommissioning-to-community story that echoes the nuclear and industrial reuse cases considered earlier in this series. The City of Freiburg bought the 41-hectare site for around twenty million euros and, between 1998 and 2006, developed it into a district of roughly five thousand residents and six hundred on-site jobs ([ITDP 2011](#); [Coates 2013](#); [Thorpe archived pre-2017](#)). The mechanism of Partnership was Forum Vauban, a funded community-advocacy body that institutionalised resident co-design within the city’s governance, alongside more than forty Baugruppen – co-housing groups that designed and commissioned their own blocks. The district is substantially car-free, with roughly half of residents living without a car, and its energy standards exceeded German norms of the time.

Vauban has created residents as stewards of both physical infrastructure and social cohesion. It shows what the braiding of all five Ps looks like when patient governance is sustained over a decade – a degree of continuity that UK funding cycles rarely permit.

There’s a trade-off: Vauban has become desirable and comparatively affluent, raising the same equity question that haunts Granby – eco-gentrification. Even wholehearted regeneration must keep asking who the renewed place is for.

The examples summarised

The above examples (counting Big Local as a programme of many) can be mapped across the five Ps. Not every case evidences every P, so there are gaps in the table. A place-based project is a portfolio of trade-offs, not a clean sweep.

Case	People (Community / Wellbeing)	Planet	Prosperity	Peace	Partnership
St Clements	23 homes, local connection / secure tenure	brownfield + listed reuse	income-linked affordability in perpetuity	reduced displacement	CLT (community benefit society)
Big Local	resident leadership (around 150 areas contrasted against	–	+41% local business units	crime –19.1 / 1,000	endowed, resident-controlled funding

Case	People (Community / Wellbeing)	Planet	Prosperity	Peace	Partnership
	29 without investment)				
Granby Four Streets	scattered community rebuilt	derelict terrace renewal	Granby Workshop enterprise + jobs	changed council engagement	CLT + Turner Prize shared with community
Vauban, Freiburg	40+ Baugruppen co-housing groups	exceeds energy norms; ~600 jobs	–	cohesion via car-free design	Forum Vauban institutionalised

Table 1 The five Ps braided through the examples given in the text (“–“ indicates not an evidenced contribution of that case)

How community regeneration fails, and what makes it last

Case studies are written by the people who succeeded, and a responsible article must correct for that survivorship bias by naming the ways regenerative community projects fail. There are five recurring failure modes, and each has a corresponding control that sits within the project professional’s gift.

- **Displacement and gentrification.** The cruellest failure is the project that regenerates a place by pricing out the people it was meant to serve, as the histories of both Granby and Vauban warn. The way to control this is the affordability-and-ownership lock written into the asset’s governance from the outset, as at St Clements – not a discount at first sale, but a perpetual mechanism held by a steward. It’s held up under pressure, so far...
- **Tokenistic engagement.** Consultation that informs but does not empower produces the appearance of participation without its substance, and the additionality is correspondingly thin. The project manager should map out the ladder of genuine participation set out earlier in this series, and the discipline of designing for additionality over an honest baseline rather than for the optics of involvement ([Minney 2025c](#)).
- **Funding discontinuity.** This is the structural weakness of the whole sector, and the Big Local case states it with uncomfortable clarity: even the flagship programme, having demonstrated what patient funding achieves, is closing in 2027. Current policy offers partial answers – the Plan for Neighbourhoods commits £1.5 billion to 75 areas, up to £20 million and expert support over 10 years per area ([Local Trust et al. 2025](#); [MHCLG 2025](#)) – but the amounts are modest against the need, and discontinuity remains the norm.
- **Capacity gaps and elite capture.** Resident-led control can be slow, can over-rely on enabler hubs, and can entrench the voices already loudest in a community ([Power to Change 2017](#)). The control is deliberate investment in community capacity and in inclusive governance design, so that the steward is genuinely representative and genuinely capable.
- **Measurement that stops at output.** A project measured at handover cannot demonstrate regeneration, because regeneration is defined by what happens afterwards. The answer to

this failure point is a benefits regime that tracks additionality over years and assigns it to a steward who is contracted, or constituted, to keep measuring.

Read positively, these five crystallise the success factors: a perpetual ownership lock, genuine empowerment, patient funding, representative capacity, and long-horizon measurement. None is exotic. Each is a decision available to the project before handover – which is the whole point.

“That’s not the project’s job”

There’s a final objection that needs addressing: that these long-horizon responsibilities belong to local government or to operators, not to the project profession. Our reply is that the decisions which determine the thirty-year outcome are made inside the project, before handover, and nowhere else. Whether affordability is locked in perpetuity, whether a steward exists at all and how it is constituted, whether the benefit has an owner who outlives the project and into the asset lifecycle – these are designed in during mobilisation and delivery, or they are not designed in at all. By the time the operator inherits the asset, the outcome is already largely determined. As this series has argued throughout, early-stage decisions matter more than downstream mitigation ([Minney 2025b](#)). The project professional’s window is precisely the window in which regeneration is won or lost.

Conclusion: the steward, not just the deliverer

Community development is the clearest case in the whole series that regeneration is a design and governance choice made during the project, even though its value accrues long after we have gone. Sustaining a neighbourhood means holding a line against decline. Regenerating it means bending the curve upward and handing someone the means to keep it bending. The mechanism that does the handing is Partnership – the deliberate creation of a steward into whose care the asset is placed in perpetuity – and the dividend, when it works, includes Peace in its richest local sense: streets that are safer because the people who live in them have the capacity and the standing to keep them so.

Adopting the five Ps is more than a change of label. It names the two pillars – Peace and Partnership – without which a community project is merely a well-built thing waiting to decay. It aligns our profession with the language the rest of the world already uses. And it leaves intact the one distinction that practice demands, between the Community we build and the Wellbeing of the individuals within it.

For the project professional the mandate is to stop thinking of handover as the finish line and start thinking of it as the moment the steward takes the baton. The questions to carry into the next community project are simple to state and hard to answer well:

- what would a net-positive outcome look like here, measured against an honest baseline?
- who will hold this asset in thirty years? and
- what must we design in now, before handover, so that they can?

How we measure and assure such long-horizon value, and the regional policies and KPIs that could make stewardship the default rather than the exception, are the subjects of the articles still to come in this series.

AI usage in researching and writing this paper – statement by the author

This article, “From sustaining to regenerating: community development as partnership”, was prepared with the assistance of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) large language model (LLM). Under direction and control of the author, the AI LLM was used to facilitate the drafting, research, and refinement process of the article. For example, AI was guided to refine the language to ensure it aligned with British English conventions, maintained a professional yet accessible tone, and avoided common AI-generated phrasing. An AI tool was also used to assist in the generation of illustrations. The author maintained full control at all times and assumes full responsibility for the completed work.

About the Author



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Minney is a business consultant. He analyses the benefits of change, and weighs them up against the need for effective operations to keep the lights on; he has built business cases of all types and is acutely aware of the pressures to make a single project a success at the expense of the organisation's objectives and the need to resist this; as a former executive board director in National Health Service he can take a portfolio overview and prioritise the individual benefits of projects to ensure the success of the whole organisation. Minney is now a project management consultant with a sideline chairing a charity restoring the sense of community for young people.

Minney specialises in putting a number on difficult benefits (such as sustainability and regeneration), motivating team members by reporting what they are achieving together and motivating teams to build the communities and companies we want to be part of – together. He believes in standards and is accredited as a Social Value practitioner and Chartered Project Professional.

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