

# Rising Up



No longer willing to abide by its outdated reputation, Ferguslie Park has become a microcosm of how to improve a local community. Now, Darkwood Crew's *Terry McTernan* is here to take you through their self-determined path to prosperity.

Once referred to as the “biggest cul-de-sac in Western Europe” by the European Parliament, Ferguslie Park is a community of 3.5 thousand people which has undergone decades of regeneration by numerous professional bodies, often parachuted in, at a cost of millions of pounds.

Yet, in spite of their efforts, the area remains persistently synonymous with poverty. However, a recent report from The Scottish Government's Social Index of Multiple Deprivations (SIMD)

shows Ferguslie Park is no longer the most deprived community in Scotland, having retained the title for eight years previously.

As a result, the way people from outside its unique PA3 1 postcode think about Ferguslie Park is often negative, derogatory and overwhelmingly unanimous. But if you were to spend some time speaking with its residents, you'd get a wholly different perspective. There really is loads going on in this tight-knit and well-organised community which we, and our

respective localities, could all learn from. The main question you'll be asking yourself is, what has changed in the last 4 years to see this community sidestep its routine, publicity-based tarnishing?

Arguably, economic conditions and the rigours of COVID-19 have made things worse. So, what is so different in Ferguslie Park that it appears to be on an upward trajectory?? Well, the short answer to this multi-faceted question arises from a historically active community seizing control of its own destiny. Yet for those who've

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performing a nightly 26-mile round trip around 4 Co-op stores and 3 Greggs’, picking up food which is later distributed to help meet local needs. Thus far, a staggering eight tonnes of surplus food has avoided landfill. They turn their food distribution vehicle into a bingo bus in the evening and have hosted 91 sessions of social isolation prize bingo throughout lockdown, even taking their services to Corseford. The locals really embraced this and often decorated their streets for its arrival, resulting the street slosh dance becoming a phenomenon. The bingo bus has driven home our community message during lockdown, with a prescription collection service, fuel top ups, mobile top ups, internet connections and device repairs all forming part of the pandemic response.

This group, along with the other three I have outlined, are fantastic examples of real community regeneration taking place with extraordinarily little financial investment. Above all else, Darkwood Crew’s work is underpinned by a belief that local people have the knowledge, skills and motivation to identify and develop effective solutions to the area’s persistent social problems.

Ferguslie Park is a vibrant and unique community harbouring a community spirit that’s unrivalled by any other. The fact that everything you’ve just read was delivered by volunteers is a testament to what a well-organised and self-aware area



it is. Ferguslie has been undergoing regeneration my entire life. If I were organising a wedding, a funeral or even a bar mitzvah, there’d be a beginning, a middle and an end. As an activist for almost 25 years, I think it’s high time we got on with getting to the end. In my experience, if the last seven months is to be viewed as anything, it must be proof that our communities not only house the problems, but the solutions.

We think about Covid, climate change, challenging poverty, community regeneration and empowerment as if they are all

mutually exclusive. In reality, local people face the consequences of all these issues every day and are often best placed to advise on how to tackle them. We must stop this gentrification agenda and obsession with thinking we know what is best for Ferguslie Park. Instead, we need to accept it for the wonderful community that it is and empower its people to identify its own solutions. As the evidence suggests, they might just surprise us.

*Keep up with Terry and Darkwood Crew’s ongoing work via Facebook, @DarkwoodCrew.*



Council had been trying to turn its back on our community. Now, we are delighted that this doesn't appear to be the case and as a result, we've been impressed by their forward thinking plans for the community.

A recent council-orchestrated consultation dubbed 'The Making Of' allowed local people to talk openly about their community and what was important to them. The publishing of their findings has been slightly delayed due to COVID-19, but it remains our intention to engage with this process fully in order to ensure that any investment attracted is spent wisely, is solutions-based and, most importantly, locally led. After all, if the last 40 years, which is my entire lifespan, has taught us anything, it's the bitter lesson that the money being spent does not always equate to the value of what's achieved.

In recent times, we've made demonstratable achievements with comparatively little cash spent. In an increasingly budget-restricted

environment, it will become even more important to identify the most effective solutions and I believe, as the evidence would suggest, that the people of Ferguslie Park had been the forgotten asset in the past. Instead of investing in my community's people and galvanizing the community behind its own regeneration, we'd instead allowed an entire industry to be built around us, offering very few jobs to local people and keeping others in lifestyles they'd grown accustomed to.

These theoretically brilliant and well-meaning initiatives masquerade as the provider of solutions, but in many cases, are the root of persistent problems. Truly empowering our communities will prove uncomfortable for some, but the glasshouse syndrome is an important issue which will eventually need to be addressed.

The group I'm primarily involved with is Darkwood Crew. After getting together to regenerate the local

village green in October 2018, this team have gone on to devise and implement a two-phase path improvement plan, allowing for several successful events including a community climate change conversation, an alternative prom and a plastic free picnic. The second phase of the path improvement plan, which will see the connecting of the village green to Glencoats Park, has been delayed due to COVID-19. However, the group have plans to plough ahead whenever it becomes feasible again. Consisting of just eight core volunteers, our key focus areas include food insecurity, fuel poverty, isolation & loneliness, mental health positivity and the environment.

Since then, the group have attracted great publicity for their wide-reaching COVID-19 response program. They have, over recent months, delivered over 6000 food parcels. Barry, who is a volunteer, has driven over 8000 miles, —————>

It was unanimously agreed that this would be addressed, so fellow activist Karen Campbell and I became quasi-community development officers, striving to identify possible projects for development. A tidy up of Glencoats Park (the Privies) was organised and attracted 45 volunteers on a freezing December morning. Utilising the 'Team Up to Clean Up' campaign, this landmark slowly but surely transformed in front of our eyes. Given the enthusiasm, the 'Pals of the Privies' was born.

Led by Karen Campbell, this group's success is truly remarkable. Comprised mainly of local women, they've become a registered charity and have successfully regenerated a 5-acre public park. The improvements that they've spearheaded include fairy and memorial gardens and a superhero and fairy trail as well as new public benches and bins. Subsequently, the park itself has become a venue for events including family inflatable day and a foam party alongside its place among the community's excellent Halloween festivities. In response to local demand, a new £60k children's play park has been installed and serves as a tangible example of what can be achieved when community and council work together. Why is this successful? It's led by local people, it's that simple!

Own Yer Bike is another local group's that's making huge changes. This organisation started off less than two years ago with the aim of recycling old bikes by teaching local young people to repair and maintain them. Overseen by Marc Small, the group has attracted significant investment, allowing them to establish a cycle hub in the heart of the community and to distribute over 300 free bikes to tackle isolation and historic health inequalities. Meanwhile, Billy Hampson's Ferguslie Arts, Festival and Social History group have hosted two successful homecoming



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reunions, bringing Ferguslie folks past and present together for a fun filled evening of nostalgia, reflection and celebration of our unique social culture. This is important as it reminds us of a time when Ferguslie's community was at its peak and where our unwavering sense of identity still stems from. Going forward, this group aspires to create a 'nae hair to grey hair' social calendar in Ferguslie Park, including playschemes, provisions for the elderly, gala days and fayres. Just like in the 'old days.'

Another example of community and council working together for the

better emerged from the abolition of the ridiculous vanity project that was the proposed elite sports village. Thanks to the collective influence of the tenants and residents of the Tannahill area, we now have a commitment for a new plan which includes 101 new homes available for social rent on top of much needed improvements in the Blackstoun Oval and Blackstoun Road areas. This is hugely significant as it will be the first social housing to be built in our community for over 60 years. Previously, there was a perception that the →



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charted the progress, they may not know that it all began with a local newspaper headline.

"Love Is in The Air Except If You Live in Ferguslie Park."

I honestly couldn't believe it, and on Valentines Day as well! Understandably raging, I wrote to the editor and expressed my real concern at this constant and unnecessary prodding at my community, arguing that it built on an already reductive viewpoint.

The accompanying article's content bore no relation to the headline, focusing on divorce rates across Renfrewshire and no justification of that area-specific remark. It really was a low blow at the expense of a community which arguably works harder than most to overcome its challenges. So, you can imagine my genuine surprise when my email was published and followed up by a phone call from the editor. 'We would love to

print positive stories about your area', he claimed, 'but we can only print the stories we get.'

From that day on, I vowed to make sure our local press and other onlookers were aware of all the positives going on in Ferguslie and to challenge this external narrative of doom and gloom.

The first step was to reconvene the Ferguslie Community Council after a 30-year recess. This proved no easy task when you consider that there was a general feeling that for the past two decades, things had been getting done to Ferguslie rather than by it.

I teamed up with fellow activist and former Councillor John McIntyre who, by coincidence, had been carrying out his own research on how best to revive Ferguslie's fortunes. He convinced me of the merits of creating a community council and for more than a year, an ever-growing group campaigned to re-establish

the former Craigelea Community Council under its new moniker.

In October 2017, the community council reconvened at its inaugural meeting with 11 members and with a sense of optimism that this umbrella structure would allow local people to shape the important decisions facing our area. Namely, the (since scrapped) plans to demolish the Tannahill area and replace it with an elite sports village, potentially displacing hundreds of our residents. Over 40 people attended and surprisingly, the primary concern was the local environment.

There was a consensus that the area was not being maintained properly, sporting uncut grass, unemptied bins and a fly tipping epidemic. Elsewhere, our green spaces had been neglected to the point they had become hot spots for anti-social behaviour, open-air drug dealing and an emergent youth gang culture. →