

# **Tomintoul and Glenlivet Regeneration Strategy & Action Plan**

## **Baseline Assessment Headlines Summary**

Dr Michael McCarthy

Dhu Rural LLP

## Headlines from the Baseline

### Environment & Enterprise

Tomintoul shares its recession experience with many other communities –larger and smaller. It is not unique

Tomintoul and Glenlivet will need to *compete* for resources and attention against *other* communities. Resources are scarce and prioritised. The community will need to make a cogent business case for investment. It should draw up a *social balance sheet* weighing assets, liabilities, capital and develop a 'Community Prospectus'. It needs to define its 'offer' (which may be multiple) and sell itself.

To ensure a sustainable regeneration strategy and have a chance of accessing funding Tomintoul and Glenlivet will need to work to the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) strategic objective of growing and diversifying the National Park economy *by drawing on the Park's special qualities*. In particular the community must focus on the Scottish Government Economic Strategy to exploit Scotland's primary objective –a low carbon economy.

Sequestering carbon, flood management, and the development of sports and more active 'green tourism' provide opportunities locally to expand the role of the natural environment as an economic driver. Stronger direction and support should be given in recognising and developing *local* enterprise solutions.

The benefits of renewable energy should be enjoyed first and foremost by the local community. There is an opportunity to replace local dependency on an expensive depleting fuel with locally available renewable energy. This would have a transformative effect.

The Baseline documentation suggests that there is scope also to enhance upland biodiversity, supply more high-quality meat and specialist and distinctive foods, generate a *range* of renewables and provide small scale recreational and tourism services which safeguard the environment, contribute to the health and well-being of the local community and which attract visitors.

A future regeneration strategy for Tomintoul and Glenlivet will be shaped by local needs and aspirations; the availability and suitability of resources and partnership; closer engagement with the Crown Estate; access to economic and social capital; local, regional and national economic conditions; and the framework established by key reports and strategies.

### Transforming a Community within a National Park

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has stated that it intends to support a *planned approach to the long term development of Tomintoul*.

It says it will take '*a rounded view of the future of the village*' setting out options for the short, medium and longer term. It will help to identify sites and opportunities for development for the future. In respect of a regeneration strategy it states that '*Should further options come from consultation with the community, via the masterplan exercise, these may be considered in the future.*' These assurances should be tested.

Some residents have mixed views about being part of a National Park. They are not clear on the benefits likely to 'cascade' or 'irradiate' to smaller rural communities as a consequence of being part of a National Park.

Some also see the Cairngorms National Park Authority as more inclined to the interests of larger settlements.

The CNPA and other partners in the National Park will need to allay the concern that the economic interests of smaller settlements not central to the grand plan could become rural backwaters.... pockets of disadvantage. A number of Glen residents feel that visitor needs are elevated above those of local communities.

Clarity is required on how the CNPA will fulfil its wish to enable communities '*to provide and secure long-term employment options which ensure they thrive in the future.*

### **Empowerment**

The consultation process at Tomintoul reveals a recurring complaint of upland communities –lip service and lack of real influence. Policies, frameworks and forums for engagement are criticised as top down, intermittent and essentially superficial. Policy is not sufficiently *customised* or *drilled down*. It must be capable of 'flexing' to suit local conditions (deteriorating) and needs (increasing).

It is clear that the community will need to identify and support 'local champions' to drive interest and help transpose ideas into initiative. It may require a full time development manager to help achieve this.

Dialogue should move quickly to an *action stage* in which there are active initiatives designed to involve and challenge people in finding and creating solutions. These should have the support of the key agencies. This will test the community's capacity for '*can do*'.

The community as a whole will need to demonstrate an ability to accept change and to review/adapt behaviour. It will need to seek out partners such as the Social Enterprise Academy, Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ) or the Scottish Social Enterprise Coalition to 'enable' it to establish relevant structures, objectives and bid for funding.

### **Punching its Weight**

Historically Tomintoul may have actually 'punched *above* its weight'. Events and social change have overtaken it. The challenge ahead is to *manage its revival* not preside over its decline. There is no 'do nothing' option.

Most communities embracing regeneration take a *project centred* approach - focusing on a building, a site, a service. Tomintoul is better placed than some. It has potential 'projects' sitting on its village green. With support and guidance it has a significant opportunity to reinvent itself. The line between further decline and a lasting revival is a thin one.

Our assessment is that this community has the assets and has the self belief.....what it needs to identify is the vehicle and the leadership to get things moving.

Market edge will be achieved by rural communities with a capability to specialise and carve niches for their goods and services. Here the challenge is to turn its 'remote' upland location into an *asset* rather than a constraint. This ties with Scottish Government Economic Strategy, CNPA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Moray Council objectives.

There are small scale 'remote rural' exemplars to learn from which have fostered enterprises majoring on fruit drinks, bottled water, preserves, confectionery, natural healthcare products, aquaculture, meat and 'home made' foods., delivery and logistics. Some could be developed relatively modestly as a 'cottage industry'.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise describes *fragile areas* as characterised by a number of factors which weaken communities, notably population loss, low incomes, limited employment base, lack of affordable housing supply, poor infrastructure and remoteness. This might read as Tomintoul and Glenlivet but these are *not* mapped as such. Nor are they designated as an *area of employment deficit*.

The community should seek an informal seminar with HIE account managers to explore how (not if) opportunities can be facilitated locally. A successful case needs to be made for Tomintoul & Glenlivet to become an '*Account Managed Community*'.

Coupled with Moray Council's Community Asset Transfer strategy there is the crux for a community initiative centred perhaps on either the High School site or the Richmond Arms Hotel. The Gordon Hotel, in our view, has a stronger chance of private sector reinstatement as a hotel.

### **Relationship with the Crown Estate**

The Crown Estate has strong supply chain management skills and holds regular internal best practice forums-one question is whether could these be 'transferred' to local businesses? It could explore assisting local businesses by deploying its expertise in the Environmental

Performance Index process or by making its staff available to help local enterprises identify and apply for grant funding.

Its employee 'champion groups' could be a significant resource for the local community to draw on in developing their sustainability policies, mapping projects, performance measurement.

In housing, the Estate's ability to take a long-term view may be an area for exploration in the context of investment in affordable housing.

The Crown Estate has stated its wish to work with local communities and business partners to help develop rural areas through the SRDP. This needs to be tested in the wider community.

There is a degree of antipathy in some quarters of the community to the Crown Estate which is seen as either *disinterested* in the prospects of Tomintoul or *too preoccupied* with its own business interests.

The relocation of its' Glenlivet Estate Office into the centre of village would in the view of some members of the community provide a strong catalyst for recovery and a robust statement of confidence in Tomintoul's future. For some, the current location is 'semi-detached'.

There is room for more studied understanding of the interests of both parties if they are to make the best of each other. What is clear is that Tomintoul has on its doorstep an extraordinary resource and a world class potential partner. The Crown Estate's approach to communities is guided by a '*sustaining communities*' champions group. In what ways could Tomintoul meet the criteria of the Community Investment Guide?

A lead should be taken locally from the Glenlivet Estate. Every encouragement should be given to facilitate further initiative and new business creation in the communities of the Glen drawing on the Estate's experience and guidance. Nationally the Crown Estate has strong customer facing skills. It could hold workshops and mentoring for village enterprises and home workers. Over 95 per cent of Crown Estate employees have customer standards training.

We recommend that the Crown Estate and the local community come together to explore in practical terms if and how experience and expertise gained in start up and diversification locally and elsewhere can be mentored and transferred. The food and drink offer locally could be one focus. The area would benefit from new local food enterprise and supply chains. The Crown Estate should be approached to play a role as a mentor and enabler.

The tightening of credit and the call in of loans and repayments will create an institutional antipathy to 'bright new ideas' and to already hard pressed shops and service providers in

rural backwaters. This places even historically resilient economies like Tomintoul at significant risk. Help is needed to unlock HIE funding.

Tomintoul should develop the Walking Festival and build a significant all year round offer around its role as the low level walking centre for the Cairngorms. It should look to support this with modest initiatives for caravan and camp sites. We understand that discussions *are* under way on the latter.

### **Competitiveness**

The ageing population will impact directly on the rural workforce and on Tomintoul and Glenlivet's competitiveness. Outcomes may include higher employment costs to pay older workers; more early redundancy; reduced labour mobility; more health issues. Tomintoul faces a *cycle of decline* unless it can retain and increase its younger population.

Variable Broadband connectivity and poor mobile reception restricts the capacity of Tomintoul and Glenlivet to develop IT based business, home enterprise and some tourism activity. It hampers opportunities to exploit new forms of E-Care and Telecare (remote healthcare and home-based assistive technology) for older people, poised to develop quickly in rural communities.

Loss of young people needs to be addressed by a raft of measures –*accessible training and education; employment choices; affordable housing; leisure opportunities*. There is little confidence that the situation of young people in Tomintoul and Glenlivet is likely to improve in the foreseeable future.

Employers should be asked to experiment with '*smarter working*' in which employees living in the Glen could reduce car journeys, fuel costs and carbon emissions by working at home 1-2 days a week.

Around £48M of GVA in the Cairngorms National Park is created by self-employment. This must be a key area for targeting new activity and added value in Tomintoul. The enterprise base needs to be diversified – it cannot over rely on business connected to or generated by visitors and tourism.

Average earnings in 2008 at £18,370 were just 74% of the Scottish average

In contrast, house prices at the start of 2009 were 130% of the Scottish average. Housing affordability remains the most persistent high ranking concern of the community at Tomintoul and Glenlivet.

The designation of the former high school in Tomintoul as a 'community facility' in the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan provides a potential core opportunity for a social enterprise but may stifle private sector interest and investment.

New housing development should not be preoccupied with affordable housing –settlement, investment, enterprise and vitality will all be better served by a programme of mixed housing development creating ‘mixed income communities’. The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan found no single reason why local people find it difficult to secure housing that meets their needs within their budget. It favours a range of housing and tenures.

### **Housing & Enterprise**

Enterprise is stymied by limited employment and supply chain opportunities and by low wages and seasonal employment. A number of local people already combine two or more jobs to make ends meet. A significant factor affecting retention of young people and attraction of families is the cost of housing.

12 dwellings have been allocated within the settlement during the life of the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan. The aims of the CNPA and its local authority partners (Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland and Moray) and the community at Tomintoul in providing housing and linking this with employment should be relatively convergent. In the short term, housing development in Tomintoul is likely to be largely ‘infill’.

The majority of homes –both old and new-should have the capacity and flexibility to accommodate home working. Housing linked *with employment* is essential to sustainable villages. The essence of affordable home working is ‘*opportunity*’ and *economic inclusion*. The concept of ‘Live Work’ where people dwell and run their own businesses *within* the home is one essential tool for combining housing and employment solutions in rural settlements.

Where working from home has a significant role to play in the National Park is in reducing car travel and carbon emissions. The Cairngorms National Park has a high level of commuting. Currently 1500 people commute in to work and 1800 commute out.

Employment in Tomintoul & Glenlivet is focused primarily on traditional forms and skills. These are unlikely to sustain either community.

### **Glenlivet**

Glenlivet is not *dependent* on the regeneration of Tomintoul for its own long term sustainability. However it would clearly *benefit* from the development of retail and accommodation facilities there and from increased visitor traffic and wider opportunities for employment.

Given the size, dispersal and ageing of its population Glenlivet is surprisingly enterprising. Characteristics which may be seen as *constraints* in some communities are held to be *positive catalysts* here

Local people emphasise that Tomintoul and Glenlivet and their outlying hamlets are part of a wider Glen community with many shared interests. Glenlivet is a small and ageing community. The level of economically inactive households will increase quickly unless a younger replacement population begins to settle here.

Glenlivet looks increasingly to Elgin and to the coast rather than to Tomintoul for its services and employment. This raises questions about whether Tomintoul could serve as a viable hub for the wider Glen. Certainly there is a desire and a need that it should be so. However, there would need to be a reorientation in outlook led primarily by improved transport connections and by significantly improved shopping facilities.

In the immediate future the health and vitality of the Glenlivet community is more likely to be determined by successfully promoting itself as a self-determining and desirable place to live and raise children. Its key social objective must be to engage the interest of families with children to settle here. The development of a stronger economic hub at Tomintoul will serve this.

### **Tomintoul**

The Glen is characterised by very small settlements. Some have looked historically to Tomintoul as the local service centre. In recent years its attraction and pull as a service hub has been eroded by poor public transport infrastructure; adverse weather, a dwindling and limited retail offer and the closure of two of its hotels.

Tomintoul has much more to offer in its history as a planned settlement. It could make far more of its 'gateway' role with well designed and better located signage. This would distinguish it from half a dozen other claimants to the gateway 'crown'.

Tomintoul's future may lie in *strengthening its gateway status* and its role as a *host* rather than as a provider of visitor attractions...which it largely lacks and cannot afford to develop. For some visitors it will be *a far more preferable place to base* themselves because it may be perceived as less expensive, more tranquil, less congested and more characteristic of the area/region they have come to see and spend money in.

Tomintoul's ageing population presents a looming challenge for health, housing and social care providers compounded by issues of access to services, transport and social isolation.

There are evident concerns about the affordability of housing for young people and families and 'homes for local people'. Perceptions of what constitutes 'affordability' are low. The particular needs of single parent families is singled out, with some young parents unable to secure full time work locally because of a lack of employment opportunities and flexible childcare.

Tomintoul may have to look outside the community for answers to some of the challenges it faces. The village would benefit from newcomers capable of 'adding value'.

A key question is whether food retail has a future in Tomintoul. This is one of the most urgent issues affecting the village in our view and may require intervention. Less than 10% purchase their full shop from local stores. Business here is increasingly unviable.

*More* businesses must take root here. A third of residents see this as necessary for the viability of the area. Yet 40% of existing businesses *need more custom* to achieve a reasonable profit. Lack of capital and credit is a growing issue for those considering start up or physical expansion. Tomintoul lacks effective branding.

Despite economic uncertainty the community here *is* enterprising and keen to find work. Nearly 20% of those in work are self-employed. The unemployment rate is around 2.2%. Only 4.2% of adults are unable to work because of disability or illness –less than half the Scotland average.

It is vital that *distance* and *virtual* learning and other forms of educational access are made available. Moray College UHI has undertaken to review the situation at Tomintoul.

### **The Community and Redundant Assets**

Receivership of the two hotels has been a significant blow to Tomintoul's visitor and hospitality infrastructure. It is more than 2 years since the hotels ceased trading. They are examples of an inexorable and nationwide shift in markets and demand. Their continuing dereliction is affecting the confidence of the community in its ability to reverse wider economic decline.

Closure has resulted in the loss of 53 hotel rooms –most aimed at couples and families. The loss of 4 public bars and 2 restaurants means that there is little in the way of an evening economy. Younger people look to Elgin or Aviemore for part time work and for diversion. This takes spending, activity and vitality out of the village. It may be a factor in 'moving on'. A detailed market and development appraisal should be agreed with the receivers. This requires high level intervention.

It is clear that business closure is not going to end with the two hotels. There are question marks over the Post Office/Store and the future of the Glenavon Hotel. A'anside Studios is already advertised for sale.

Even so the community is determined to adapt. There may be scope for one hotel to be retained, repositioned and remarketed to attract a new niche market. The school may suit other forms of niche accommodation.

The school is the focus for emerging ideas for social enterprise. However, there are a number of significant difficulties and considerations associated with its physical condition.– including asbestos and its current use designation. The school is a *potential* but *compromised* asset for Tomintoul.

## **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing' must be the ultimate aim of a regeneration strategy. Social, economic, cultural and environmental interests must be considered and treated holistically. 78% of people consulted about the effects of public service cuts thought that these would be severe in Tomintoul.

The lack of a *regular* bus service connecting Tomintoul and Glenlivet with main centres reduces employment, service and social options for both communities and amounts to 'relative deprivation'.

The volunteer base here is an ageing and reducing pool. The baton needs to be taken up by younger people. However, numbers are few and there are concerns about being able to retain and motivate the next generation.

Historically Tomintoul has enjoyed a strong sense of 'wellbeing'. This comprises environmental and social characteristics which up until recently have ensured resilience. These are now challenged –possibly threatened -by localised and national social, environmental and economic circumstances.

These events produce social and psychological responses which can undermine a community's sense of worth. This can blunt its optimism and challenge its confidence in the future.