

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING PRACTICE

South Lanarkshire Council: Local Spend on Gypsy/Traveller Site Improvement Works

South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) has undertaken a pioneering approach to improving Gypsy/Traveller sites by embedding community wealth building (CWB) principles into site improvements. This case study explores how SLC leveraged procurement, community engagement, and culturally sensitive planning to deliver impactful, inclusive improvements at the two council owned sites within Larkhall and East Kilbride.



Context

South Lanarkshire Council operates two Gypsy/Traveller sites—Shawlands Crescent in Larkhall and Springbank Park in East Kilbride. Improvement works at both sites are being delivered in phases, based on resident-led masterplans. Phase one (2022/23) included new community facilities, pitch extensions, and utility upgrades. Phase two is currently underway, focusing on amenity unit upgrades and new play areas.

The council's approach aligns with its community wealth building strategy, looking to procure services from local contractors and internal services to maximise local economic



benefit. Funding has come primarily from the Housing Revenue Account, with additional support from the Scottish Government’s Gypsy/Traveller Additional Accommodation Fund and the Scottish Procurement Alliance Community Endowment Fund.

Residents have been actively involved in shaping and prioritising projects. The council’s inclusive and collaborative model has received national recognition, including awards from COSLA and the Municipal Journal in 2022, and is now shared as best practice across Scotland.

The masterplan approach

While there has been a long-standing approach to engaging with residents on the sites, prior to 2019 this was mainly in relation to service delivery. In 2019, discussions highlighted that the needs of the community had changed and that an investment programme was needed for a range of improvement works.



This led to the creation of detailed site masterplans, developed in collaboration with residents, outlining phased improvement projects. These plans include both resident-requested upgrades and council-mandated works to meet safety and site standards. Projects are aligned with key goals: enhancing community engagement, reducing social isolation and digital exclusion, and improving energy efficiency. Residents are regularly consulted and kept informed through tailored communication methods, ensuring the plans remain responsive to changing needs.



Local Procurement

South Lanarkshire council saw an opportunity to tie the improvement works into their community wealth building ambitions. As outlined in their Community Wealth Building Strategy: *“the council will support and encourage the local economy to grow sustainably through the effective use of procurement to benefit local communities”*.

“So we’re trying to utilise as many of our internal services or our own building services or electricians, to try and increase the spend [that] is going internally as well [as] to our paid workforce—many of who live in South Lanarkshire.”

Where possible, in-house services were used which kept money circulating locally. Where



procuring services was necessary, Quick Quotes frameworks for contracts below £1 million. Quick Quotes allows for smaller scale tender and so won't immediately attract the large organisations, it also provides some flexibility to add project specific specifications to the requirements.

Residents played a key role in the procurement process by helping shape the specifications to include cultural competence and previous work experience with gypsy/traveller groups and use of local resources. This ensured that contractors with a proven track record of working respectfully with Gypsy/Traveller communities were selected to deliver the works.

Even when larger frameworks were required, the council embedded criteria around cultural competence, helping to achieve positive local and social outcomes without breaching procurement rules.

Partnership and Collaboration

South Lanarkshire Council has been working collaboratively with North Lanarkshire Council to support Gypsy/Traveller communities, particularly around planning processes. Recognising that many Gypsy/Travellers face barriers navigating the national planning system, especially due to low literacy levels. The council are in discussions about jointly proposing a local solution: enabling planning officers from each council to assist residents in completing planning applications.

“You speak to a resident on our site and they wouldn't tell you where the boundary between North and South Lanarkshire is... they just want to be treated fairly.”



The collaboration reflects a pragmatic, resident-focused approach that transcends administrative boundaries, acknowledging that Gypsy/Traveller communities often move across council areas and therefore require a broader collaborative support. A future ambition is to influence national planning policy to better support culturally specific housing

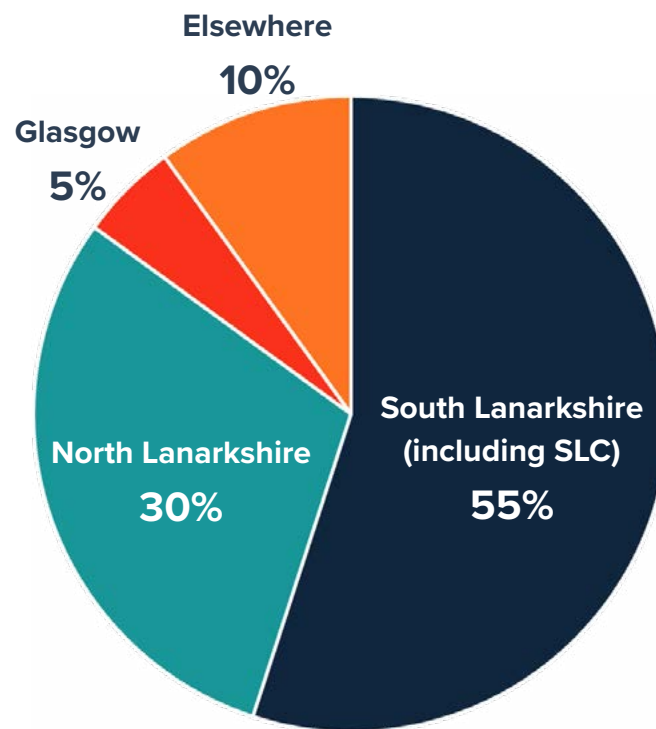
models, such as homes with yards for chalets or trailers, which are currently difficult to deliver.

Outcomes

Because of the approach taken, outstanding figures of local spend were achieved (see image). A significant proportion of spend was retained locally, supporting South Lanarkshire's internal workforce and local SMEs.



Figure: Proportion of total spend to date across contractor locations for projects completed at both sites



An additional outcome of taking a masterplan approach which involved residents in decision making, was the connection and ownership for improvement works this instilled in residents. For example, for the design of the play area at Shawlands Crescent, around 40 children participated in a dedicated engagement session where they selected the equipment and layout of the park. This inclusive approach not only fostered community buy-in but also aims to lead to reduced vandalism and greater respect for the space. Even residents who initially had concerns about noise or anti-social behaviour became supportive, as the park reflected the community's collective input and was installed by a local contractor familiar to the residents.



New play area at Shawlands Crescent installed, designed by children and young people on the site.

Lessons learned

The project faced a range of challenges that offered valuable lessons. Procurement constraints required careful balancing of value for money with the need for culturally appropriate contractors. Time and budget pressures added urgency, as work had to be completed quickly within limited resources, all while residents remained on-site during construction. This complicated logistics and increasing the need for sensitivity and speed. The lack of an alternative decant site posed some challenges, with residents initially choosing to remain on site and later finding life on a building site highly disruptive.

Due to the nature of Gypsy/Traveller cultures, sustaining engagement can be difficult due to turnover within the community, requiring repeated efforts to rebuild trust and re-establish relationships with new residents. There is a renewed focus on integrating new residents and ensuring their voices shape ongoing improvements.

Lessons from masterplans:

- Never say no to requests to discuss further. Concurrent engagement throughout project delivery has been key to the South Lanarkshire's success, enabling residents to keep up to date with progress but also have their say on the finishing touches.
- Be consistent with the council officers involved in the projects, ensuring residents know who is responsible for what and how they can contact them. A small project team works well in South Lanarkshire with trust being built between officers and residents.
- Familiarise external contractors working on the sites with Gypsy/Traveller culture and ensure residents have the opportunity to meet with them before the project commences
- Regular meetings between the residents, council staff and external contractors were really helpful in ensuring resident views were heard and helped to build trust. It was beneficial to hear information first hand.

Future plans and sustainability

As the capital investment works for the Gypsy/Traveller sites nears completion, the council's CWB approach is shifting toward revenue-based initiatives, including local procurement for services, community events, and support for resident-led activities. Residents are increasingly seen as capable of securing external funding, with the council positioned to assist them in using such resources to enhance community life. While the small scale of the Gypsy/Traveller sites enabled deeply localised CWB, future housing projects - such as large-scale new builds - will apply the approach differently, with a focus on regional contractor engagement.

Strategically, the council remains committed to ensuring that site improvements are not only maintained but continue to reflect the cultural needs of the community as they change. Central to all future work is the principle of equity and inclusion - ensuring Gypsy/Traveller residents receive the same quality of housing services, repairs, and engagement as others.

