

GoWell is a collaborative partnership between the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, the University of Glasgow and the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, sponsored by Glasgow Housing Association, the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

**Area  
reputation:  
An examination  
of newspaper  
coverage of the  
Red Road  
estate**

February 2012

*GoWell is a planned ten-year research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It commenced in February 2006 and has a number of different research components. This paper is part of a series of Briefing Papers which the GoWell team has developed in order to summarise key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the research. Further information on the GoWell Programme and the full series of Briefing Papers is available from the GoWell website at: [www.gowellonline.com](http://www.gowellonline.com)*

 INTRODUCTION

Some places within towns and cities have poor reputations; that is, the general public think of them as ‘not good places to live’ or visit, holding a range of negative views about them, which are often also projected onto the people who live there. The reasons for this vary, ranging from concerns about crime and safety, about poor quality housing, or about local cultures of drinking and drug-taking, to name a few issues. The consequences for residents of such places have been reported to include emotional effects (e.g. feelings of shame), service effects (e.g. lower quality or more expensive services provided), and labour market effects (e.g. job discrimination)<sup>1</sup>. More recently, area reputation has been found to be associated with lower levels of trust in neighbours, suggesting a negative community-level effect from area reputation<sup>2</sup>.

The GoWell Wave 2 community survey in 2008 showed that in both the regeneration areas and peripheral estates being studied, the majority of residents felt that their area had a negative external reputation across the city. In the case of the regeneration areas, we also found that only a minority of residents thought that their area had a positive internal reputation i.e. among the people who lived there<sup>3</sup>. Subsequent analysis revealed that the internal reputation of an area (which may be crucially affected by its external reputation) was strongly associated with mental wellbeing<sup>4</sup>.

Both for the wellbeing of residents, and in order to ‘transform’ disadvantaged places into sustainable neighbourhoods, regeneration should seek to change the image and reputation of a place alongside improving its environmental and social conditions. Past research on deprived areas in cities such as Liverpool, Edinburgh and Stirling have shown that area reputations are often long-standing, related to local mythology and history, and sustained partly through media coverage<sup>5-6</sup>. Other studies have confirmed that the social identities of places are reflected and projected by the media<sup>7</sup>, and that newspapers play an important role in this by constituting a major source of local news and information on social issues<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, one route to changing the reputation of places must be through trying to influence the coverage that such places receive in popular newspapers.

In this paper we examine newspaper coverage of the Red Road estate in Glasgow to see what can be learnt about the image and reputation of the estate as projected by newspapers and the types of stories which sustain that reputation. This is with a view to informing future attempts to improve the reputation of Red Road and other disadvantaged areas through regeneration programmes which incorporate media management efforts. In an earlier paper we examined the newspaper coverage of the Sighthill estate<sup>9</sup> and an accompanying paper compares the coverage these two estates have received<sup>10</sup>.



### Research questions

In examining newspaper coverage of Red Road, we asked the following questions:

- What is the quantity of newspaper coverage of the estate?
- What is the balance of that coverage between positive, negative, mixed and neutral?
- What sorts of stories (topics) generate which types of coverage?

### Search for articles

We used online electronic archives to search for, identify and categorise newspaper articles that discussed the Red Road estate. We focused on three different Glasgow-based newspapers. The availability of articles online varied for each and so our period of study varied slightly for one as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Newspapers searched and period of study**

Newspaper	Period of study
The Herald/Sunday Herald (Broadsheet)	January 1998 to August 2011
The Evening Times (Afternoon/evening tabloid)	January 1998 to August 2011
The Daily Record/Sunday Mail (Morning tabloid)	13 July 2000 to August 2011

### Categorisation of articles

A number of articles that emerged from the initial search were deemed irrelevant to the study as they were not about the estate itself; predominantly articles that discussed the 2006 film *Red Road* with no reference to the estate. The remaining articles were categorised according to the image of the Red Road estate that they conveyed to a reader with little prior knowledge of the estate. These categorisations were made based on such factors as: the volume of text conveying a particular image; the wording of that text; the tone or seriousness of the article; the wider context within which the estate is discussed; and the positioning of the discussion of the estate within the article.

Articles were categorised as: positive; mixed; negative; or neutral (i.e. Red Road was discussed in the article but no evaluative image of the estate was conveyed).

Readers' letters published in newspapers were treated as articles for the purposes of this analysis since they occupied print-space and so were available for reader consumption.

The large majority of articles were categorised by a single researcher. As a check, a random selection (34 articles) of all relevant articles (5% of positive, 10% of mixed, 5% of negative and 5% of neutral articles) were examined and categorised by a second researcher. The rate of correspondence between the two researcher's categorisations was 85%. As a result of this and further checking of articles on similar topics, 14 articles were re-categorised.

## Balance of coverage

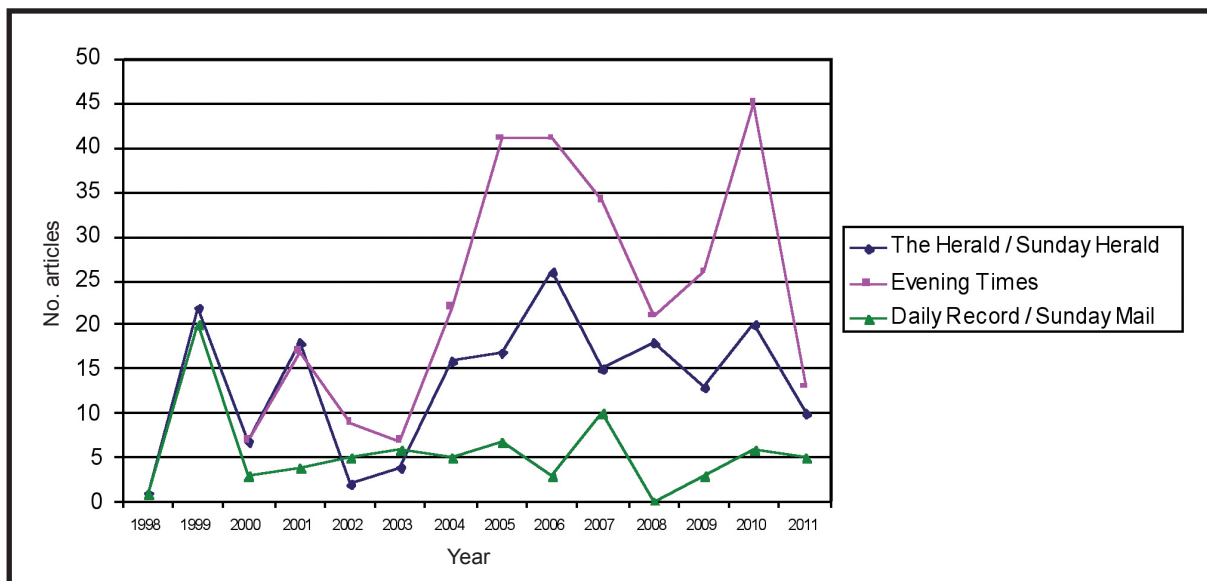
The balance of coverage was assessed in two ways. First, the total number of articles over time within each category (positive, mixed, negative and neutral) was counted, and by newspaper. Second, articles were divided into those directly and indirectly about the estate, and the volume of words within direct articles of each category was counted. This was done to check, for those articles which were presented as being about the Red Road estate from the start, whether one type of article was on average longer than another; in other words, how much wordage, or page-space, was devoted to different types of story within articles directly about the estate. The following definitions of direct and indirect articles were used:

- A direct article is one where either Red Road or an event explicitly described as happening on the estate was the primary subject-matter, or where Red Road was the main case-study or example used to illustrate the topic or argument of the article (provided the case-study took up a substantial proportion of the article).
- An indirect article is one where none of the above applied, but where nonetheless Red Road was discussed, either in relation to the topic of the article (but with an insignificant amount of space given to the estate) or unrelated to the main topic of the article.

## Quantity of coverage

The amount of coverage of the Red Road estate has fluctuated over time in all three newspapers. In total, 550 articles referred to Red Road over the last 14 years (1998 to 2011).

### Newspaper coverage of Red Road 1998-2011



Within this overall coverage, the following patterns can be identified:

- **There have been two peaks in Red Road coverage, in 2004-6 and in 2010 in the Herald and Evening Times.**

The 2004 rise is due to coverage of attacks on refugees and asylum seekers and of Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) regeneration plans, which seems to have prompted pieces on the history of Glasgow public housing. In 2005 coverage jumped again due to GHA's announced demolition and regeneration plans for Red Road, as well as the Clyde redevelopment plans which were likened to Red Road's high-rises. This peak in coverage was maintained in 2006 due to further GHA regeneration plans for Glasgow and the success of the Andrea Arnold film *Red Road*. Across these three years the coverage was mainly indirect.

The 2010 peak, most significant in the Evening Times, was mainly due to the suicides of a Russian asylum seeking family who were living in a Red Road flat. This coverage was mainly directly about the estate.

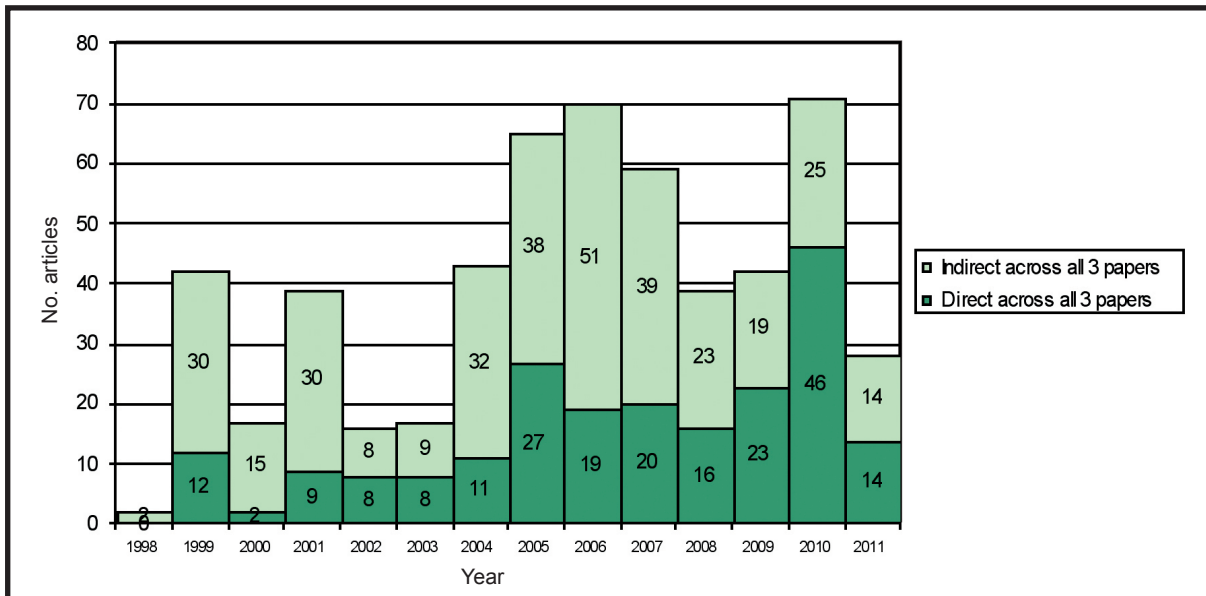
- **Coverage of Red Road has been erratic and inconsistent.**

In all three newspapers, coverage has largely fluctuated year-on-year, often rising sharply before falling again. These fluctuations are even more pronounced month-on-month, with periods of two to eight months where no coverage was identified.

- **Coverage has become increasingly direct.**

In total, the ratio of direct to indirect articles has been 39:61. Up until 2006 the amount of indirect coverage, while uneven, consistently outweighed direct coverage of Red Road. Over the last five years, however, the ratio of direct coverage has increased, such that in 2010 it outweighed indirect coverage. This was partly due to direct coverage of GHA demolition and regeneration plans for Red Road as well as of community initiatives on the estate, though this has been almost entirely in the Evening Times. By 2010, however, all three papers were giving more space to direct than indirect coverage, due mainly to the asylum seeker family suicides in March 2010.

**Newspaper coverage of Red Road 1998-2011 - direct / indirect balance**



- **The Evening Times has carried significantly more coverage of Red Road than the other two papers.**

From 2000 to 2011, the Evening Times published almost a third more articles referencing Red Road than The Herald and the Daily Record combined. The Daily Record carried by far the least coverage – less than a third of the Herald’s coverage or a fifth of the Evening Times.

Significantly, while the Evening Times published 70% more Red Road-related articles than The Herald from 2000-2011, both papers carried about the same number of indirect articles (144 to 127 respectively). As a result, the Evening Times published over 3.5 times as many articles directly about Red Road than The Herald over the same period (139 to 39 respectively).

## Balance of coverage

Categorising articles that discuss Red Road allows us to examine how the three Glasgow-based newspapers have covered the estate over the years and what consequent image of Red Road they have most likely given to their readers.

- **Over the last thirteen and a half years, the impression given of Red Road by Glasgow-based newspapers has been a predominantly negative one.**

As Table 2 shows, negative coverage has outweighed any other type of coverage, with positive coverage being very much in the minority. The dominance of negative coverage is even more prominent when one examines the amount of words devoted to each kind of coverage in articles directly about the estate.

**Table 2: Balance of coverage, January 1998 to August 2011**

	% of all articles	% of word count (direct articles only)
Positive	9	9
Mixed	22	37
Negative	41	51
Neutral	28	3

Year-on-year, coverage has fluctuated between being predominantly negative or predominantly neutral, although in recent years mixed coverage has been most likely to be the second-largest category each year (after either negative or neutral).

The balance shifts depending on whether direct or indirect coverage of the estate is examined (see Table 3). The share of negative and mixed articles is greater among direct articles. A large proportion of indirect articles are neutral.

**Table 3: Comparison of direct and indirect articles**

	% of direct articles	% of indirect articles
Positive	9	10
Mixed	34	14
Negative	47	36
Neutral	10	40

- **The Evening Times has been the most positive (and mixed) in the balance of its coverage of the estate. The Herald has been the most negative in its coverage, and the Daily Record the most neutral.**

The balance of coverage shifts depending on which newspaper is analysed. Table 4 shows the balance of coverage for each of the three newspapers for the period 2000-2011. In the case of all three newspapers, around two-thirds of the published articles contain negative material about the estate (being negative or mixed), but within this, the balance is more heavily weighted towards negative articles in the case of The Herald and the Daily Record. The Evening Times has published proportionately more positive articles than the other two papers.

**Table 4: Balance of coverage by newspaper, January 2000 to August 2011**

	The Herald (%)	Evening Times (%)	Daily Record (%)
Positive	7	11	4
Mixed	16	27	19
Negative	49	37	47
Neutral	28	25	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (166)</b>	<b>100 (283)</b>	<b>100 (57)</b>

While the Evening Times has devoted the largest proportion of its coverage to positive images of Red Road, its significantly larger number of published articles means it has actually published nearly as many negative articles in the period 2000-2011 (104) as The Herald and the Daily Record combined (108) in the same period.



There are further differences in the newspapers' balance of coverage when considering direct and indirect articles separately. As Table 5 shows, the Evening Times has published proportionately far fewer direct, negative articles about the estate than either The Herald or the Daily Record. The latter two newspapers have published very few direct, positive articles on Red Road.

**Table 5: Balance of Red Road coverage by newspaper, for direct and indirect articles, January 2000 to August 2011**

	The Herald (%)		Evening Times (%)		Daily Record (%)	
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Positive	5	7	10	12	0	6
Mixed	28	13	37	17	28	13
Negative	64	44	40	34	64	34
Neutral	3	36	13	37	8	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (39)</b>	<b>100 (127)</b>	<b>100 (139)</b>	<b>100 (144)</b>	<b>100 (25)</b>	<b>100 (32)</b>



## NEGATIVE COVERAGE

Two-in-five articles referencing Red Road portrayed the estate in a wholly negative light. Notwithstanding the sporadic and often inconsistent nature of the coverage, at least six overlapping themes can be identified as creating negative coverage (in descending order of prevalence):

- Problems with living in the flats
- Violence and crime
- The poor environment on the estate
- Demolition plans
- Suicides
- Red Road as emblematic of high-rise problems

### Problems with living in the flats

Articles discussing Red Road frequently highlighted various aspects of the high-rise tower blocks seen as diminishing the quality of life of residents. Almost half of all negative articles perceived Red Road through the problems of living in its high-rises. This occurred more in direct than indirect coverage. Often the impression was given that problems experienced by residents were a result of the buildings they were living in.

- **Poor design / planning.** Journalists and commentators frequently levelled criticism at the design and citing of the high-rise buildings in direct articles, noting the following: the deterioration or ‘crumbling’ of the flats over time; their dilapidated condition; the use of asbestos; the small size of the lifts; the lack of nearby amenities; and the isolation of the high-rises from the Springburn community and the rest of Glasgow, a situation sometimes referred to as the estate’s ‘ghettoisation’.

A key problem with the design of the buildings that newspapers also highlighted was the height of the flats, with references to broken lifts, difficult climbs up stairs for residents, and parents being unable to look after their children playing outdoors. Less frequent height references included: the discomfort of the flats swaying in the wind; fires high up in the flats and difficulties associated with putting them out; and the idea that ‘stacking’ people in high-density housing created social problems.

- **Poor living conditions.** This was sometimes stated explicitly, with references to ‘appalling living conditions’. Often articles noted that by the mid-1970s residents were complaining about ‘living conditions’ in the flats. Examples of these living conditions were not always offered, but included: living in cramped apartments; dealing with damp and mould; asbestos problems; lack of decent public space; and floors being ‘needle-covered’.

- **‘A post-war housing solution ... but then problems emerged’.** A brief narrative of the Red Road flats’ history has been repeatedly printed over the last decade in numerous direct articles, often to provide context when papers covered a new story about the estate. The narrative begins by stating that the Red Road flats were ‘hailed ... as the solution to Glasgow’s post-war housing problems’ or were ‘the tallest residential blocks in Europe at that time’, but then go on to state ‘problems soon emerged’ concerning ‘lifts’, ‘vandalism’, ‘security’ and ‘living conditions’.
- **Bad reputation.** A handful of articles noted that the Red Road estate had a ‘bad reputation’, mainly due to its association with 1960s high-rise housing. The reputation of residents was also reflected in some articles that recounted jokes at Red Road’s expense, painting the estate’s residents as misogynist, sectarian, thieving, cheap and violent. A handful of articles also referred to the estate as ‘infamous’.
- **Bad aesthetics.** Some articles described the Red Road flats as ‘ugly’, ‘imposing’ or ‘intimidating’. This also became the main subject of a couple of articles in 2005 when the Royal Fine Arts Commission likened a draft plan of the Clyde Waterfront development unfavourably to the Red Road flats.
- **Undesirable housing.** Infrequent references were made to the flats being difficult to let due to their undesirability. This was included in reasons for demolition.
- **Flats as a bad environment for asylum seekers and refugees.** From 1999, when refugees from Kosovo were housed in the Red Road flats, articles (mainly indirect) have implicitly and explicitly asserted that the high-rise tower blocks are unsuitable for refugees and asylum seekers. Sometimes this is due to resentment from other tenants or racist abuse; at other times articles suggested that refugees from rural areas would ill-adjust to the flats.
- **A lack of neighbourliness and community.** A lack of neighbourliness was sometimes expressed by interviewed residents who would state they didn’t know their neighbours or have much contact with them. Similarly, refugees and asylum seekers in the flats would sometimes describe not feeling welcome due to the attitudes of neighbours. Tensions between refugees and ‘locals’ were also noted in resident interviews as making it difficult to form a community in Red Road. A couple of articles implied that the flats themselves, both due to their problems and their being demolished, had damaged the ‘dwindling community’.

## Violence and crime

Reporting of acts of violence or crime occurring in, or involving people from, Red Road has been a mainstay of negative coverage. This coverage chimes with assessments or potted histories of the estate which mention 'problems with crime and security', as well as making references to the estate as 'notorious' and a 'trouble-spot'. References to a notable police presence on the estate also contributed to an image of Red Road as a violent place.

Explicit references to violence and crime, mainly occurring in direct coverage of the estate, included:

- **Assaults on the estate.** A large proportion of the reported assaults were against asylum seekers or refugees housed in Red Road flats. These assaults, frequently reported up to 2005, were often described as 'racist attacks' carried out by 'gangs of youths'. Red Road was noted in indirect coverage as accounting for a large proportion of such assaults in Glasgow. Assaults on people who were not asylum seekers were also reported.
- **Vandalism on or near the estate.** Coverage came in three forms: references in potted histories of Red Road to problems with vandalism emerging in the 1970s; coverage of rail vandalism by young people; and resident discussions of vandalism both as a problem in the past and a current one.
- **Drugs.** This was discussed in two main contexts: drugs as a problem on the estate, with references both to 'junkies' impacting on others' quality of life and to syringes lying about flats; and drug-dealers living on the estate being targeted by the police.
- **Murder and attempted murder.** Sometimes these stories referred to events on the estate, and at other times to events involving people from Red Road. These were often one-off stories, a notable exception being the 2002 murder of Douglas Dunlop and serious wounding of his brother Darren in their flat at Petershill Drive; this event attracted several days of coverage.

Less-frequent references were also made to:

- **Sectarianism.** This was compared both to Northern Ireland and to Kosovo, the latter in the context of Kosovar refugees being housed in Red Road.
- **House-breaking and burglary.** Both reported as problems experienced by Red Road residents.

## The poor environment on the estate

Independent of the problems with living in the high-rise flats, all three newspapers discussed what was variously described as the 'bleak', 'rundown', 'badlands' or 'wasteland' of the Red Road estate. This negative coverage of the estate's environment, occurring more in indirect than direct coverage, falls into two main categories:

- **Poverty.** Red Road was often used as a case study or example in articles discussing wider issues related to poverty. These included articles on: economic and health inequalities in Glasgow; poor living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers; poor living conditions in Springburn; potential areas of BNP support; the decline of high-rise living; shark loan targets; and a poverty commission.
- **Deprivation.** Red Road has been referenced as 'one of Scotland's most deprived areas', a 'symbol of deprivation in the north of the city' and one of the 'most deprived areas' in Glasgow. Explicit references to aspects of this deprivation included: unemployment; health problems; alcoholism; litter; a lack of anything to do on the estate; a lack of funding for initiatives on the estate; and the idea that the environment of the estate was a threat to people's wellbeing.

## Demolition plans

Over the last decade, frequent direct and indirect coverage of Red Road has discussed the possibility of, and later the plans for, the demolition of the flats. More than a fifth of all negative coverage has referenced demolition.

The possibility of demolition was first raised in 2001 with reports that council housing stock transfer in Glasgow could result in high-maintenance tower blocks being brought down. This was reported as the '[e]nd for city's tower block hell'. Red Road coverage that discussed demolition plans became much more frequent after 2005, the year GHA announced their intention to demolish the flats.

A substantial proportion of negative Red Road coverage was negative in part due to references to demolition. This was for two interrelated reasons:

- **Good homes do not get demolished.** The implication of references to the demolition of the Red Road flats was, more often than not, that there must be something intrinsically problematic about the flats that they cannot be allowed to remain standing. The majority of demolition references in negative coverage were in articles not directly about Red Road, but about demolition or investment plans happening in other parts of Glasgow.

- **No context given for demolition.** As stated, most demolition references in negative coverage were in articles not directly about Red Road. In such cases, references often did not go beyond stating that ‘flats in several estates, including Red Road, are due to be demolished’. Without the provision of any elaboration or context, the whole estate is portrayed in a negative light, as simply ‘being pulled down’.

## Suicides

Negative coverage in 2010, the highest year for such coverage in a decade, was almost entirely related to the suicide of a Russian family in March 2010 whose asylum application had been refused. Discussion of the suicides occurred largely in direct coverage. The suicides, which involved the three people jumping out of the window of their fifteenth floor flat, were dubbed a ‘high-rise suicide pact’ and a ‘high-rise death jump’. Later their deaths were described as the ‘Red Road suicides’, with reports that the Red Road estate was known as ‘suicide central’. The fact the suicides were consequently portrayed as a Red Road issue as much as an issue of asylum policy, helps explain the negative image given of the estate.

## Red Road as emblematic of high-rise problems

The Red Road flats were often mentioned in indirect articles about high-rise living or the building of high-rise estates in Glasgow. In these articles, Red Road was discussed as an example of the problems of high-rise living, as ‘suffering from the problems which beset the high-rises of the 1960s’ or as ‘illustrat[ing] the problems high living creates in a community’. Articles narrating the decline of high-rises used Red Road as a case study.

Similarly, in the context of GHA’s demolition and regeneration programme, Red Road was referred to as part of the ‘worst’ of the high-rises to be demolished. Less frequently, Red Road was portrayed as a ‘lesson’ to be learnt from the ‘mistakes of the past’ for contemporary high-rise construction.



## MIXED COVERAGE

Some of the primary reasons for negative coverage – the idea of bad quality of life in the estate and bad living conditions in the flats – were not disputed in the mixed coverage of Red Road. Rather, what made nearly a quarter of articles analysed convey a mixed image of the estate were stories of efforts to improve the estate or maintain a decent quality of life within it. Mixed coverage also involved assessments of the estate which concluded that while it had problems, these were not the only things that should characterise it.

The main themes prompting mixed articles about Red Road were:

- Regeneration plans
- Efforts to unite communities
- Coping in a bad environment
- The 'end of an era'
- Bad reputation not deserved
- A post-war housing solution
- Mixed reaction to stock transfer and demolition plans

### Regeneration plans

A quarter of articles that gave a mixed impression of Red Road discussed GHA's regeneration plans for the estate. Around half of this coverage was indirect, forming part of an article mainly about another estate to be regenerated in Glasgow. The direct coverage focused either on GHA's plans for Red Road specifically or on the wider regeneration of Glasgow in a way that highlighted the estate.

There were two main reasons these stories led to mixed coverage of the estate:

- **A 'welcome' and 'much-needed' move to 'transform a deprived area'.** Half of the mixed coverage mentioning regeneration portrayed the GHA plans as a needed response to deprivation on the estate or as a move welcomed by residents of the flats who want better accommodation and services. This conveyed the image of a housing estate in need of an improvement that regeneration would hopefully bring. Similarly the idea of 'transformation', sometimes 'of an entire community', portrayed the estate and its community as it stood in a negative light, albeit with the conclusion that things would now get better.
- **Descriptions of what regeneration will mean.** The other half of this regeneration coverage described what GHA's regeneration plans would specifically mean for Red Road: the demolition of the flats followed by the building of 'adequate housing'; community services; parks; the creation of hundreds of jobs;



further, an 'attractive, more vibrant neighbourhood' and even a 'new communit[y]'. This information, while positive, implied that up until this point Red Road has lacked such decent housing, amenities and employment, as well as either a decent neighbourhood or community.

## Efforts to 'unit[e] communities'

Nearly a fifth of mixed coverage of Red Road discussed efforts to reduce tension or foster integration between different groups of people living on the estate. Two groups in particular were highlighted: young people; and asylum seekers; and discussion occurred in two main contexts.

- **Operation Reclaim.** This is a Strathclyde Police operation launched in 2004 'to tackle the gang fighting and racist attacks that made [Red Road] a no-go area'. It involves a permanent night-time police presence and the provision of recreational activities for young people on the estate. Now expanded to other areas of Glasgow, the operation was often described in articles as having 'transformed a community' by 'reclaiming' residents' public space from violence.

Articles have generally viewed the operation through two lenses which explain the resultant mixed image of Red Road. The first is a crime lens: with 'running battles' and graffiti making residents 'afraid to go out', the operation's success is pegged to a decrease in crime, with gang members taking part in sports activities.

The second is an integration lens: the operation is often described as having 'started as an integration project for asylum seekers', a way to get teenagers 'black and white' mixing. The lenses were often combined, with the operation framed as a response to 'recreational racism' by gang members on asylum seekers, a situation the police tackled by having 'racist thugs' take part in 'a range of activities alongside refugees'.

- **Integrating asylum seekers.** Many articles highlighted efforts to 'integrate' asylum seekers 'into the community' at Red Road. As noted, Operation Reclaim was often discussed in this context, but so were other projects on the estate. These included efforts regarding asylum seeker children at All Saints RC Secondary School, described as 'a model of successful integration', and the Red Road Family Centre, described as having taken 'an active role' in helping asylum seekers integrate. Articles also discussed the ShaRed Road project, which aimed to 'unite youngsters from different backgrounds' and 'tackle racism' by providing a 'neutral environment' for socialising as well as communication and performance art skills for asylum seekers and refugees.



Other integration efforts mentioned just once include the Red Road Integration Project ('try[ing to] improve services for asylum seekers'), integration efforts on the part of church ministers and the individual contributions of Pastor Makieokele Daly. These articles led to mixed portrayals of Red Road as they were discussed in relation to problems of crime or racial tension on the estate.

## Coping in a bad environment

Almost a fifth of mixed articles presented a narrative of individuals, groups or communities getting by as best they could in an environment that would otherwise damage their quality of life. Although Red Road residents in these narratives were portrayed as acting positively or benefitting the lives of others, the environment of the estate itself was seen to act against them.

This occurred in a number of contexts:

- **Good projects in a bad estate.** Some articles discussed projects providing services to Red Road residents. Sometimes these projects were described as working 'against the odds' in a context of deprivation, as in the Red Road Wrestling Club, the local Scout troop or Bonnybroom Nursery and Family Centre – 'an oasis' amid 'doomed flats'. Other initiatives worked to counteract negative aspects of living on the estate: for instance, the North Glasgow Advice Centre gave impartial advice and representation to low-income tenants facing steep rents or eviction.
- **A community coping with death and deprivation.** In the aftermath of deaths of Red Road residents, newspapers described the community as 'coping' either by coming together in mourning, as was the case with the death of the schoolboy Suhail Saleh in 2004, or by protesting the deaths, as happened after the 2010 suicide of a Russian asylum seeking family. The Red Road community was also described as 'strong' or 'good' despite deprivation on the estate. A couple of articles promoted what could be called a social realist view of the estate when citing the 2006 film *Red Road*. A few quoted Red Road residents as being proud of their estate despite its deprivation and relative disadvantage.
- **Refugees coping in an unfriendly environment.** A small number of articles portrayed refugees and asylum seekers in Red Road as either trying to get by in the face of racism from 'locals', suffering from poor living conditions or living in fear of deportation, the latter nonetheless with resident support.

## The ‘end of an era’

Nearly a sixth of mixed coverage described the Red Road flats as ‘famous’ or ‘iconic’, or described their demolition as representing the ‘end of an era’. These descriptors occurred, however, alongside descriptions of the estate’s notoriety for violence and crime, or alongside discussion of the problems of high-rise living that have led to the flats’ demolition. The flats were also described as famous in the context of the Andrea Arnold film *Red Road*, though again the impression was given that this fame was a result of the estate’s problems rather than its virtues.

## Bad reputation not deserved

Nearly a dozen articles implied that an image of Red Road as a bad environment with bad residents is not universally true. Sometimes this was addressed explicitly by residents arguing the estate did not deserve its bad reputation, that it ‘wasn’t as bad as people thought’. This was expressed, for example, in relation to the film *Red Road*. At other times this conclusion was implicit in resident interviews; either in the idea that not all ‘local’ residents resented refugees housed there; or, that whatever other people were like on the estate one’s neighbours were friendly (a view expressed by both locals and refugees); or, that it was a minority carrying out acts of racism or violence.

## A post-war housing solution

Just as in the negative coverage, a brief and particular narrative of Red Road’s history was presented in several articles. This two or three-sentence story was almost identical to the one printed in negative coverage, only in this case there was less emphasis placed on the problems that emerged after the flats were built in the early 1970s and more emphasis placed on the flats being an improvement upon the tenement housing they replaced. Sometimes the narrative simply stopped at the flats being built, jumping to a discussion of regeneration plans.

When problems with the flats were listed, so were their benefits compared to tenements, including larger rooms, indoor bathrooms and clean air. These benefits were sometimes described by residents or ex-residents who were among the first to live in the flats. This was often expressed in nostalgic terms by residents who could remember when the flats were impressive or were seen as an improvement; these residents would then acknowledge the need to knock the flats down today. The Red Road flats were also sometimes described as having been designed to live up to a ‘utopian ideal’, an offer of ‘more possibilities of freedom’ than before.

## Mixed reaction to stock transfer and demolition plans

Several articles gave a mixed image of resident reaction first to the transfer of council housing stock to GHA, then to the latter's plans to demolish the Red Road flats. Articles would quote roughly equal numbers of residents in favour or opposed to each decision, the latter citing a lack of transparency and accountability, the upheaval that will be caused by the regeneration programme, and the potential for alternatives to demolition.



### POSITIVE COVERAGE

Just under one-in-ten articles about Red Road were entirely positive in tone. Perhaps because of the relatively small number of positive articles, compared to mixed and negative articles, the reasons for the positive coverage of Red Road were arguably more consistent. Four themes were identified for wholly-positive articles:

- Community initiatives on the estate
- Refugees welcomed and supported
- Recognition for the Red Road flats
- Benefits of stock transfer and regeneration

## Community initiatives on the estate

The activities of community projects working on the Red Road estate were cited in more than half of positive articles. These were primarily projects started and located in Red Road (e.g. Red Road Family Centre) but also some originating outside the estate that worked within it (e.g. North Glasgow International Festival).

These community initiatives were discussed in three overlapping contexts:

- **Services provided to the community.** Articles would frequently describe the different services these initiatives provided to the Red Road community. These included the Red Road Women's (later Family) Centre providing support and childcare facilities; the Springburn Alive and Kicking Project providing activities for elderly people on the estate; and the ShaRed Road project providing arts activities for young people. These services were often portrayed as improving quality of life for those in the community.
- **Cultural activities.** Initiatives were also portrayed as organising or taking part in cultural activities either on the estate or with reference to the estate. These included football tournaments, processions, arts projects and entertainment shows (most notably the Red Road Young 'Uns for the latter).

- **Awards.** Initiatives from Red Road were often covered when winning awards, particularly by the Evening Times in the context of the paper's Community Champions awards.

## Refugees welcomed and supported

A fifth of positive articles conveyed the image of refugees housed at Red Road being welcomed to the estate by residents or supported by them when they faced difficulties. The former scenario occurred especially in the context of Kosovar refugees being housed at Red Road in 1999, with refugees describing feeling welcomed by the community and grateful for their refurbished flats. Support from the community was portrayed in the context of school and community integration programmes, as well as community protests at dawn raids and attempted deportations of refugees and asylum seekers by the Home Office.

## Recognition for the Red Road flats

Nearly a dozen articles gave positive recognition to the high-rise tower blocks in Red Road. Half of these were in the context of external assessments or polls of the most historic buildings in Scotland. The other half included scattered references to the 'iconic' or 'famous' Red Road flats and to the 'eye-catching' aesthetics of the buildings, as well as one-off references to the flats' appearance in the 2006 film *Red Road* and to the idea that the flats were an improvement upon tenements.

## Benefits of stock transfer and regeneration

A handful of articles briefly described benefits either of housing stock transfers in 2001 and 2010 or of the GHA regeneration programme for the estate. Benefits claimed for the former included more resident control of decision-making, while benefits of the latter included new-build housing and play parks.



## NEUTRAL COVERAGE

After negative coverage, the second-largest group of articles were those giving a neutral image of the Red Road estate. These were articles that mentioned Red Road but without the need to discuss the estate's physical or social condition. While neutral coverage comprised 27% of Red Road articles, these were mostly indirect and significantly shorter than others, averaging about 150 words per article compared to about 430 for each other category. Four main topics can be identified for the production of neutral articles about Red Road:

- Asylum seekers and refugees
- The film *Red Road*
- The height of the flats
- Individuals and projects from Red Road

### Asylum seekers and refugees

Around a third of the 148 neutral articles discussed asylum seekers or refugees. Some of these mentioned that refugees were being/had been housed in Red Road within a broader discussion of refugees. Most of the articles mentioning asylum seekers or refugees were about individuals or families living on the estate. These discussions occurred in a number of contexts:

- **Dawn raids.** Asylum seeking families whose applications were rejected were often seized at their home at the Red Road flats'. Some articles also noted protestations or vigils held by Red Road residents in response to these raids.
- **Kosovar refugees.** During 1999 the majority of neutral coverage of Red Road focused on the housing of refugees from Kosovo in the high-rise flats. This coverage followed the refugees on their journey from their homes to Scotland, and described their responses from their flats to the continuing war.
- **Deportation cases.** Papers followed the deportation cases, including appeals, of a small number of asylum seekers, most notably Pastor Makieokele Daly.

### The film *Red Road*

Almost two-dozen articles discussed the 2006 Andrea Arnold film *Red Road*, either directly or in a broader discussion of one of the film's actors. Most often articles simply noted that the film was 'set in one of Glasgow's high-rises'. Sometimes the articles were reviews of the film, in which case they described the plot as revolving around 'a CCTV operator in the tower blocks that dominate the city skyline'.

## The height of the flats

Nearly two-dozen neutral articles simply mentioned the height of the Red Road flats, most frequently in terms of their being 'Europe's tallest homes at just over 328ft' (though some articles disputed this accolade). Contexts in which Red Road's height was mentioned included: the possible erection of a new high-rise building in 2004 that would be higher than Red Road; the high-wire attempt between Red Road flats by Didier Pasquette in 2007; and photographs both of and from the tower blocks.

## Individuals and projects from Red Road

Two-dozen neutral articles mentioned or discussed people and projects from the Red Road estate in a context where the estate itself was not relevant. In terms of projects this included art projects which happened to be based in Red Road but which gave no impression of the estate (e.g. the exhibition based on Didier Pasquette's high-wire attempt) and reports on cuts to funding for community centres across Glasgow, one of which was based in Red Road. Reports on individuals involved residents or ex-residents of the estate, sometimes celebrities, whose coverage was not related to where they live(d).



## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis conducted here, of newspaper coverage of the Red Road estate over the past thirteen and a half years, leads us to the following conclusions.

- **Newspaper coverage is likely to be an important factor in area reputations.**

The earlier finding from our Wave 2 survey was that most people in regeneration areas, including Red Road, considered that their area had a bad reputation among the people in Glasgow<sup>3</sup>. This paper confirms that newspaper coverage plays an important role in creating or sustaining that negative impression of Red Road, of which residents are aware. This is because nearly two-thirds (63%) of all articles published about Red Road by Glasgow-based newspapers have contained negative content – either wholly negative or mixed in content. That is equivalent to more than two articles per month over the entire 13.5 year period.

- **Red Road's high-rise has mostly been detrimental to its image.**

High-rise can be portrayed positively as well as negatively, and has appeared in both mixed and positive articles about the estate. However, due to the volume and prominence of high-rise in negative stories, Red Road's 'iconic' high-rise flats have been more a curse than a blessing to its reputation.

- **Red Road has suffered by being used as an exemplar by journalists.**

Unfortunately, negative coverage of Red Road often occurs when journalists want to write about issues across Glasgow or Scotland as a whole, most notably poverty and deprivation, high-rise housing, demolition and regeneration.

- **Regeneration has at best resulted in mixed coverage of Red Road. However, it can result in negative coverage where insufficient detail of future actions and improvements is provided.**

It is hard to avoid the fact that news stories about regeneration are most often couched in terms of the problems of the estate which regeneration seeks to address, therefore containing a significant amount of negative content about the estate. This negative content, and the overall negative impression, can be reduced however where details are also given about the future plans for the area in terms of the provision of better housing, environments, services and amenities. A focus in any regeneration statement or press release on demolition or on physical regeneration plans alone can offer journalists an easy route to repeat old stories about the high-rise flats and poor environments. Moreover, demolition of the flats – if that is the story presented by relevant agencies – only deals with one aspect of the negative portrayal of the estate's problems, leaving the other main problems that are often mentioned in such articles unresolved, namely: violence and crime; poverty and deprivation; and community decline.

- **Social regeneration programmes offer the prospect of securing positive coverage for disadvantaged estates.**

The converse to the last point is shown when we look at what things have tended to generate positive stories about Red Road, namely community services and projects, cultural activities, community cohesion and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. The fact that positive coverage of the estate is numerically so low could be due to a lack of such social regeneration programmes within the estate, or a lack of awareness of these amongst journalists. These issues should be considered by regeneration practitioners working to transform places and turnaround their predominately negative public images.





## REFERENCES

1. Dean J, Hastings A. *Challenging Images: Housing estates, stigma and regeneration*. Bristol: Policy Press; 2000
2. Kullberg A, Timpka T, Svensson T, Karlsson N, Lindqvist K. Does the perceived neighborhood reputation contribute to neighborhood differences in social trust and residential wellbeing? *Journal of Community Psychology* 2010; 38:5, 591-606
3. GoWell. *Progress for People and Places: Monitoring Changes in Glasgow's Communities*. Glasgow: GoWell; 2010
4. GoWell. *Briefing Paper 12: The contribution of regeneration to mental wellbeing in deprived areas*. Glasgow: GoWell; 2011
5. Robertson D, Smyth J, McIntosh I. *Neighbourhood Identity: people, time and place*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; 2008
6. Flint J, Casey R, Green S. *Rethinking neighbourhood image, reputation and stigma*, mimeo. Sheffield: CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University; 2007
7. McLaren L, Perry R, Curruthers L, Hawe P. Introducing a means of quantifying community reputation: the print media as a data source. *Health and Place* 2005; 11: 187-194
8. TNS System Three. *Public Attitudes to Broadcasting in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research; 2008
9. GoWell. *Briefing Paper 7: Area reputation: An examination of newspaper coverage of the Sighthill Estate*. Glasgow: GoWell; 2010
10. Kearns A. *Briefing Paper 19: Area reputation: comparing newspaper coverage of the Sighthill and Red Road estates*. Glasgow: GoWell; 2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been produced on behalf of the GoWell team. The current GoWell team is as follows:

**Sheila Beck** (Ecological Monitoring Team)  
**Lyndal Bond** (Principal Investigator)  
**Julie Clark** (Researcher)  
**Jennie Coyle** (Communications Manager)  
**Fiona Crawford** (Ecological Monitoring Team)  
**Matt Egan** (Researcher)  
**Ade Kearns** (Principal Investigator)  
**Kenny Lawson** (Health Economist)  
**Louise Lawson** (Researcher)  
**Mark Livingston** (Researcher)  
**Phil Mason** (Researcher)  
**Martin McKee** (Researcher)  
**Kelda McLean** (Programme Administrator)  
**Joanne Neary** (Postgraduate Research Student)  
**Carol Tannahill** (Principal Investigator)  
**Hilary Thomson** (Researcher)  
**David Walsh** (Ecological Monitoring Team)

We would like to express our thanks to **Oliver Kearns** who contributed to this paper.

### **Suggested citation:**

Kearns A. *Briefing Paper 18: Area reputation: An examination of newspaper coverage of the Red Road estate*. Glasgow: GoWell; 2012



A graphic consisting of two overlapping abstract shapes. The larger one is teal and the smaller one is grey. The teal shape is on the left and the grey shape is on the right, overlapping it.

**Area  
reputation:  
An examination  
of newspaper  
coverage of the  
Red Road  
estate**

February 2012

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

For further information, please contact the report author:

*Professor Ade Kearns  
Department of Urban Studies  
University of Glasgow  
25 Bute Gardens  
Glasgow  
G12 8RS*

*Email: [ade.kearns@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:ade.kearns@glasgow.ac.uk)  
Phone: +44 (0)141 330 5049*