

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:  
Comparing  
newspaper coverage  
of the Sighthill and  
Red Road  
estates**

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

Within the GoWell Programme, we are studying a number of estates undergoing transformational regeneration. Within these estates, a majority of residents consider that their areas suffer from a 'bad reputation' among the people of Glasgow<sup>1</sup>. In order to give the residents of these estates a better quality of life, regeneration would hope, and should plan, to change the reputations of the places concerned. In order to inform such attempts, we have examined the role that media, and in particular newspaper, coverage of the estates has played in maintaining their image and reputation.

So far we have examined over a decade of newspaper coverage of Sighthill and Red Road and reported the results in two briefing papers<sup>2,3</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast media coverage of the two estates. This is of interest because the two estates are located not very far from each other in the north of the city, and both consist predominantly of high-rise tower blocks of flats dating from the 1960s. Therefore, an analysis of how estates in similar circumstances are treated by newspapers may reveal things about how the media operates, which could inform attempts to change the estates' images and reputations.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this paper we address the following questions:

- How does the quantity of newspaper coverage of the estates compare?
- How does the balance of that coverage compare?
- Do similar or different topics generate stories of similar types for each estate (positive, negative, mixed and neutral coverage)?
- How does the treatment of major, dominant issues compare between the two estates?



## METHODS

The methods used to identify and categorise newspaper articles about both estates have been described in detail in the two relevant briefing papers on Sighthill and Red Road<sup>2,3</sup>. The key components of the methods were as follows:

- The coverage of three Glasgow-based newspapers was examined, those being: The Herald/Sunday Herald; the Daily Record/Sunday Mail; and the Evening Times.
- Three independent on-line databases were used for search purposes and to read relevant articles. In the case of two of the newspapers (The Herald and Evening Times) the results were double checked against the newspapers own online archives.
- The relevant search periods were January 1998 to August 2011 for The Herald and the Daily Record, and July 2000 to August 2011 for the Evening Times.
- Articles included in this analysis included three types of item:
  - Main articles by journalists within the paper.
  - Readers' letters about either estate.
  - Articles which included a photograph of either estate, even if the estate itself was not mentioned in the text, but where a reader would make a connection between the article content and the estate represented in the picture.
- Categorisations as to whether an article was positive, negative, mixed or neutral were made based on a number of factors including the amount, tone and positioning of text on particular issues.
- The categorisations were made by a single researcher but with a verification check of a sample of categorised items by a second researcher: 8% of Sighthill articles and 6% of Red Road articles were double-checked in this way, resulting in the re-categorisation of 25 Sighthill articles and 14 Red Road articles, mostly ones that had originally been classed as 'mixed'.

With categorisations for each estate's coverage completed, the respective coverage of Sighthill and Red Road was then compared. A single researcher identified the most significant and prominent issues connected to both estates and examined whether these issues were treated differently depending on which estate was being discussed. The results of this comparison are detailed in the 'Differentiated portrayal of issues' section later in this paper.

## COVERAGE COMPARED

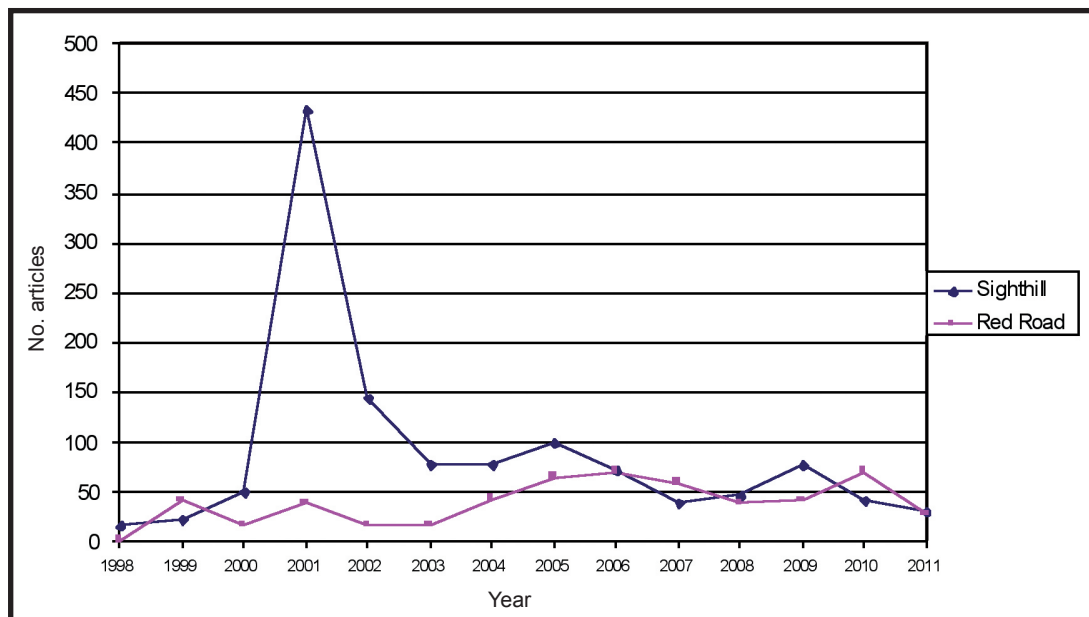
### The quantity of coverage compared

Over the period 1998 to 2011 we identified around 1,800 newspaper articles about one or other of the two estates. That is equivalent to around ten newspaper articles per month over the entire period mentioning one or other of the estates. In terms of coverage of each estate, we found the following:

- **Coverage of Sighthill far exceeds coverage of Red Road.**

Although coverage of each estate has fluctuated over the last thirteen and a half years, in total over this period 1,237 articles have referred to Sighthill while 550 articles referred to Red Road, with less than 100 articles mentioning both estates (mainly in coverage of asylum seekers in the first half of the decade and Glasgow-wide regeneration in the second half).

#### Glasgow-based newspapers coverage of Glasgow estates 1998-2011



Within this overall coverage of both estates, the following points of comparison are notable:

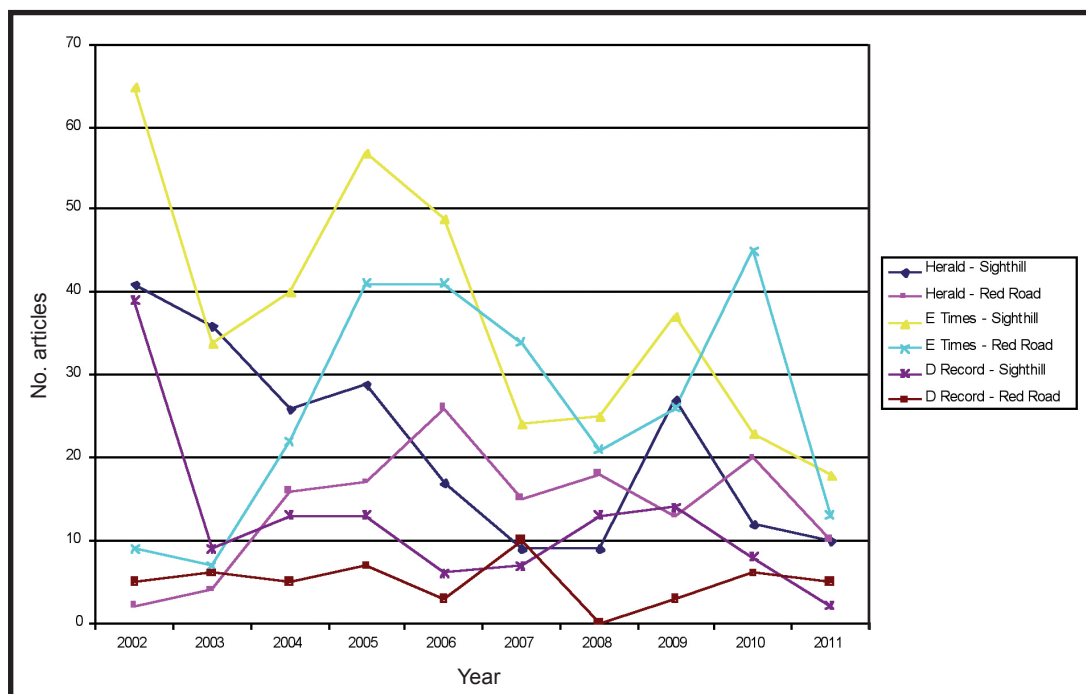
- **Coverage of Sighthill in 2001 by far outweighs coverage of either estate in any other year.**

This peak in coverage of Sighthill is due to coverage throughout the year of asylum seekers and refugees housed on the estate, particularly concerning physical assaults on asylum seekers and responses from the authorities. Following the murder of Firsat Dag in August 2001, coverage of Sighthill increased dramatically. Despite a sharp decrease in articles referencing Sighthill thereafter, the wide disparity in coverage between the two estates remained through to 2005, due to references both to Sighthill's asylum seeker and refugee population and to Firsat Dag's murder.

- **After 2005, the amount of coverage of the two estates was more similar, with differences in any particular year due to particular events on each estate.**

2005 saw moderate increases in coverage of both estates, mainly as a result of announcements of demolition and regeneration programmes. Collectively, coverage of both estates was almost equal from 2006 to 2008; this was roughly the case for all three newspapers. In 2009, the newspapers collectively published nearly twice as many articles referencing Sighthill than Red Road, a result of ongoing coverage of demolition plans for Sighthill and resident opposition. In 2010 coverage shifted to Red Road, a consequence of the suicides of a Russian asylum seeking family living on the estate.

**Newspaper coverage of Sighthill and Red Road 2002-2011**



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

From 2000 to 2011 (the period for which we have full data for all three newspapers), the Evening Times published 45% of all articles about Sighthill and 56% of all articles about Red Road. The Herald published a third of the articles on each estate and the Daily Record published 22% of articles about Sighthill and 11% of articles about Red Road.

## The balance of coverage compared

By categorising articles referencing either estate, we are able to compare the image presented of each estate by newspapers. The categorisations were based on an assessment of what impression of the estate a person with little prior knowledge of the estate would get from reading each article.

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

Negative coverage has outweighed any other type of coverage for both estates, while positive coverage has been very much in the minority, as shown in Table 1. Considering that mixed articles will contain some negative material about an estate (balanced with more positive material), we can say that around two-thirds of each estate's coverage contained material giving a wholly or partially negative impression of that estate.

**Table 1: Balance of coverage of both estates, 1998 to 2011**

	Sighthill (%)	Red Road (%)
Positive articles	9	9
Mixed articles	19	22
Negative articles	49	41
Neutral articles	23	28

- **Coverage of Sighthill has persistently been more negative than coverage of Red Road.**

Year-on-year, Sighthill coverage has been the most frequently negative, with only 2008 and 2009 seeing another category (neutral) outnumber negative articles. From 1998 to 2001, negative Sighthill articles outnumbered all other categories combined.

In the case of Red Road, coverage has fluctuated between being predominantly negative and predominantly neutral, with mixed coverage increasing its share in recent years. From 2000 to 2003, negative Red Road coverage outnumbered all other categories combined.

- **The balance of coverage of each estate varies between newspaper.**

The most negative coverage has been the Daily Record's coverage of Sighthill, followed by The Herald's coverage of both estates. The Evening Times provided the most balanced coverage of both estates (though negative coverage was still the largest category).

**Table 2: Balance of coverage of both estates by newspaper, 2000-2011**

	The Herald (%)		Evening Times (%)		Daily Record (%)	
	Sighthill	Red Road	Sighthill	Red Road	Sighthill	Red Road
Positive	7	7	12	11	5	4
Mixed	21	16	18	27	16	19
Negative	48	49	45	37	60	47
Neutral	24	28	24	25	19	30

Owing to the paper's more balanced coverage, the Evening Times published the highest proportion of positive coverage of both estates. In absolute terms, however, the Evening Times published more articles from 2000-2011 referencing Red Road (283) than the other two papers combined (223) and more than four fifths (541) of the other two papers' coverage of Sighthill (656). As a result, although the Evening Times has been the least negative in its coverage of either estate, the paper has actually published more negative articles overall than any other newspaper.

- **The respective peak years of each estate's coverage were also the years with the most negative articles published.**

In 2001, the peak year of Sighthill coverage, newspapers published 273 negative articles – nearly as many negative articles on Sighthill as would be published for the next decade.

Red Road's peak year of coverage, 2010, saw 35 negative articles published.



## NEGATIVE COVERAGE COMPARED

Although negative stories have dominated coverage of both Sighthill and Red Road, the subjects of those stories have differed somewhat between the two estates. While certain topics appeared in both estates' negative coverage, other topics were only negatively associated with one estate.

### Violence and crime

Reports on acts of violence or crime have been mainstays of both Sighthill's and Red Road's coverage. Both estates have been cumulatively portrayed as violent crime-ridden areas, with a particular emphasis on the following:

- **Assaults.** In the early part of the 2000s negative coverage emphasised assaults on asylum seekers and refugees, often by 'gangs', in each estate, although this focus was far greater for Sighthill than Red Road, particularly after the murder of Firsat Dag in 2001. In recent years, coverage of such assaults has dropped, while a smaller number of assaults of non-asylum seekers have also been reported.

Both estates have been highlighted over the years in the context of police statistics on violence and crime in Glasgow, particularly racially-motivated harassment and assault. Reports from non-governmental organisations on racially-motivated crime in these estates have also been covered by newspapers; these reports were split roughly 50:50 between the two estates, in contrast to the Sighthill slant of overall coverage on racially-motivated crime.

- **Vandalism.** Sometimes in an historical context but often reported as a contemporary problem.
- **Drugs and drug raids.** Covered more frequently over the decade in the case of Red Road.
- **Murder and attempted murder,** involving people on or from the two estates. In the early part of the decade newspapers covered murders of asylum seekers and refugees, while in later years murders of non-asylum individuals have been covered, most often as one-off stories.



## The poor environment

Both Sighthill and Red Road have variously been described as ‘deprived’ and ‘run-down’. For Sighthill these references frequently occurred up to 2003 in relation to criticism of ‘dumping’ asylum seekers in the estate. With the announcement of regeneration plans in 2005, both estates were referenced as having high levels of deprivation, with Red Road also described once or twice as representing the ‘badlands’ or ‘wasteland’ of Glasgow. Negative coverage of the estates’ environment has mainly involved:

- **Poverty.** Both estates have been described as areas with high levels of poverty. For Sighthill, the period following Firsat Dag’s murder prompted references to the poverty experienced by both tenants and asylum seekers. More indirectly, Red Road was often used as an example in articles discussing wider issues related to poverty, such as health and economic inequalities in Glasgow, poor living conditions of asylum seekers, or the decline or high-rise living.
- **Lack of opportunity and services.** Issues such as the 2003 closure of allotments due to arsenic, vulnerability to negative equity and low standards of street cleaning and refuse collection in Sighthill have given the image of a lack of decent quality services on the estate. Red Road has been cited for its levels of unemployment, alcoholism, litter and health problems.

## Asylum seekers and refugees

Negative coverage related to asylum seekers and refugees was remarkably different in quantity and content depending on whether Sighthill or Red Road was being covered. The quantity of negative coverage relating to asylum seekers and refugees was far greater for Sighthill than for Red Road, with nearly 45% of the former’s negative coverage from 2001 onwards referring to asylum seekers or refugees. While asylum seekers and refugees constituted the primary topic of Sighthill’s negative coverage, specific issues related to asylum seekers were rarely the main story of negative articles on Red Road. Asylum and refugee-based negative coverage mainly involved:

- **Verbal and physical attacks on asylum seekers and refugees.** In the period 2000 to 2003, this issue was more often than not discussed in a Sighthill context, particularly after the murder of Firsat Dag in August 2001. Verbal and physical assaults in Red Road were nonetheless covered, notably in 2004 when The Herald reported on a Positive Action in Housing study of racist assault by using case studies from Red Road.

- **‘Racial tension’.** The idea of there being tension between estate residents and asylum seekers and refugees was one frequently applied only to Sighthill, both in the 2001-2002 period and subsequently as an historical reference point. Concepts such as a ‘backlash’ to asylum dispersal and ‘racist tenants’ were only applied to this estate.

The closest Red Road’s negative coverage came to these topics was in infrequent references to a lack of neighbourliness and community, with refugees describing their not being made to feel welcome and residents arguing it was difficult to form a community out of so many nationalities.

- **Sympathy for asylum seekers and refugees.** In negative coverage of both estates, journalists have sometimes portrayed asylum seekers and refugees sympathetically, as having been ‘dumped’ by a badly thought-out dispersal policy in deprived estates with poor living conditions. In the months preceding and following Firsat Dag’s murder, this issue appeared in Sighthill coverage, while for Red Road this became an issue both in 1999 with the housing of Kosovar refugees and in 2010 following the suicides of an asylum seeking family.

What distinguished this sympathetic portrayal in Sighthill from Red Road was that the former was often framed in the context of racism and intimidation experienced by asylum seekers on the estate.

## High-rise living

When arranged by issues, the largest proportion (close to half) of Red Road’s negative coverage related to problems with living in the estate’s high-rise tower blocks diminishing the quality of life of residents. Such problems were rarely discussed in the context of Sighthill. Discussion of the problems of high-rise living most often related to the following:

- **Poor design/planning.** Red Road’s high-rise buildings were frequently criticised for their design and citing, with references to the deterioration of the flats over time, the isolation of the flats from amenities and Glasgow, and height-specific problems such as small unreliable lifts, the unsuitability of the flats for families and refugees and the difficult climbs up stairs.

Sighthill’s negative coverage once or twice referenced fires in the tower blocks and studies on overcrowding, although both issues were more regularly covered on Red Road. When Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) announced in 2009 that two Sighthill high-rise blocks would not be demolished, some reader letters criticised the decision on the grounds that high-rises were unsuitable for living in; this was the only time high-rise living in the context of Sighthill was discussed in any depth.

- **Poor living conditions.** Linked to the above, Red Road negative coverage often discussed the poor living conditions of residents, describing cramped apartments, damp, mould, problems with asbestos, lack of decent public space and ‘needle-covered’ floors. While negative coverage of Sighthill certainly discussed poor living conditions on the estate, these were not often connected to the nature of high-rise living or problems with the flats themselves.
- **Emblematic of high-rise problems.** Red Road was often presented in articles on high-rise living as an exemplar of the problems associated with 1960s public housing or the implicitly inevitable problems of living in high-rises. Similarly, articles narrating the decline of high-rise housing used Red Road as a case study and a ‘lesson’ to be learnt from the ‘mistakes of the past’. Sighthill was rarely discussed in any of these contexts.



## MIXED COVERAGE COMPARED

In the cases of both estates, there is some overlap and connection between negative and mixed articles. However, some disparity in coverage between the two estates is also carried over from negative coverage.

### Asylum seekers and refugees

As with negative coverage, a large proportion of newspapers’ mixed coverage of Sighthill related to asylum seekers and refugees, although such coverage had dropped significantly by 2007. By contrast, mixed coverage of Red Road that referred to asylum seekers and refugees represents a small minority of coverage. In addition, Sighthill’s mixed coverage often related to issues in negative coverage, whereas Red Road’s asylum coverage was less consistent.

Issues covered in mixed articles included:

- **The link between ‘racial tension’ and deprivation.** While deprivation was discussed in relation to both estates, ‘racial tension’ between asylum seekers and other residents was only related to Sighthill. As a result, the idea that racial tension may be connected to such things as poverty and council neglect was discussed frequently in a Sighthill context, but was not considered relevant to Red Road.
- **Efforts at integration.** Both estates have received mixed coverage on efforts to improve relations between asylum seekers and residents by integrating the latter into the community. Sighthill, however, received substantially more coverage of this sort, with articles framing Firsat Dag’s murder as a ‘turning point’ that resulted in community and council-led integration efforts to tackle the ‘racial tension’ already discussed.

Without wider substantial asylum seeker coverage, discussion of Red Road integration efforts stemmed largely from coverage of particular integration and anti-racism initiatives that happened to operate in Red Road, including Strathclyde Police's Operation Reclaim (where both gang members and refugees take part in recreational activities), efforts of the Red Road Family Centre, All Saints RC Secondary School, and the ShaRed Road project.

## Regeneration plans

With the 2005 announcements of regeneration plans for Sighthill and Red Road, a substantial proportion of both estates' mixed coverage became devoted to this issue. This coverage was generally mixed for the following reasons:

- **Housing estates in need.** Both estates were portrayed in regeneration coverage as being disadvantaged relative to the rest of Glasgow due to deprivation, making regeneration both welcomed and much needed. While the prospect of demolitions conveyed the image of a housing estate whose buildings were unsatisfactory for living in, descriptions of potential regeneration portrayed the estates as having future prospects.
- **Residents against demolition.** One month after GHA announced plans to demolish the Red Road flats, The Herald ran a very short piece on a public meeting held 'to gather opposition to the demolitions'. This was the only time such campaigning was covered. By contrast, in the years after demolition plans were announced for Sighthill, newspapers covered resident opposition to and campaigning against the demolition of Sighthill's high-rises. This coverage lasted up to 2009 with the announcement that two high-rise blocks at Pinkston Drive would not be demolished; the event was framed as GHA 'accept[ing] tenants' calls' and '[p]eople power sav[ing] the Sighthill scheme'.

## Estates as not universally bad

One important way mixed coverage made connections to negative coverage was by explicitly counteracting the image of the estate in question as only possessing negative characteristics. While both estates received this kind of 'counterweight to negativity' coverage, Red Road was connected to more topics of this kind, while the vast majority of Sighthill's mixed coverage remained linked only to asylum seekers and regeneration. The counterweight topics included:

- **Good initiatives in a bad estate.** Projects and initiatives providing services to Red Road residents were sometimes portrayed as 'working against the odds' in the context of deprivation, or as working to counteract negative aspects of living on the estate such as steep rents. This portrayal of projects and initiatives

was slightly different in relation to Sighthill, where projects were often portrayed not as counteracting the estate's negative qualities but as attempting to integrate asylum seekers.

- **Bad reputation not fully deserved.** A small number of articles implied that the image of Red Road as simply a 'bad estate' with 'bad residents' was not universally accurate. This was most often expressed by interviewed residents in response to reports of violence, crime or racial intimidation, or in the context of nostalgic recollections of Red Road's past. Similarly, a number of articles in the months following Firsat Dag's murder argued that racism in Sighthill was restricted to a minority and that the image of the estate as racist was unfair. This argument often came from readers' letters or political figures.



## POSITIVE COVERAGE COMPARED

The positive coverage of Sighthill and Red Road are similar in two respects. The first is that both estates' positive coverage is small compared to mixed and negative coverage, comprising only 9% of each estate's total coverage. Secondly, both estates' positive coverage primarily looks at community schemes and projects, though the way these initiatives are covered differs between the two areas.

### Community venues and projects

In the case of both estates, the majority of positive coverage has revolved around community venues (such as community centres and sports clubs) and projects run by organisations such as schools and the police. Projects were portrayed as providing a service to the community they worked within, although the nature of that service differed between the estates:

- **Services provided to the community.** In the case of Red Road, community initiatives and projects covered provided particular services to residents, including housing support, childcare facilities and activities for the elderly, with particular emphasis on the Springburn Alive and Kicking project and the Red Road Young 'Uns entertainment group.
- **Multicultural projects and activities.** In Sighthill newspapers focused on projects seen to benefit the multicultural nature of the community. Up to 2005, this coverage was dominated by the North Glasgow International Festival, which sought to 'promote integration and harmony' on the estate. Beyond this, anti-racism and multicultural initiatives run by both Sighthill Youth Centre and local primary schools were also covered, the latter also being noted for their more general efforts to integrate refugee children.

## Support for asylum seekers and refugees

In the case of both estates, newspapers devoted some positive coverage to accounts of support being provided for asylum seekers and refugees:

- **Community initiatives.** As already discussed, initiatives and projects on both estates comprised the majority of positive coverage, some of which included initiatives providing services to asylum seekers and refugees. This occurred more frequently in relation to Sighthill, often in the context of awards won by individuals helping asylum seekers, but did also occur in relation to Red Road.
- **Welcoming refugees.** In 1999, coverage of Kosovar refugees being housed in Red Road included numerous descriptions by refugees of being welcomed by the community and of being grateful for their refurbished flats. This coverage was markedly different from any received by Sighthill when refugees arrived in 2000.

## Regeneration plans

After regeneration programmes were announced for both estates in 2005, a proportion of both estates' positive coverage has related to these plans.

- **Investment.** Initial coverage of GHA regeneration announcements for both estates included relaying investment figures of millions of pounds. Since Sighthill's investment plan was announced before demolition plans, this initial coverage was positive; the investment announcement for Red Road included demolition plans, making the coverage mixed.
- **Benefits of regeneration.** A small number of positive articles on both estates outlined GHA's intended benefits of regeneration, focusing on the building of new homes and community spaces such as play parks.

## Recognition of the Red Road flats

One group of positive stories unique to Red Road was based around recognition of the high-rise tower blocks, in the context of being historic buildings and an important part of the history of Glasgow. The flats were sometimes described as 'iconic' or 'famous' and as having 'eye-catching' aesthetics. No such discussion occurred around Sighthill's high-rises.



## NEUTRAL COVERAGE COMPARED

The second largest category of coverage for both estates was neutral coverage. This was also generally the category with the shortest articles. Neutral articles were those that mentioned one of the estates without giving an evaluative image of the estate. Such coverage tended not to be based around specific themes but instead was spread across a wide range of topics. As such, the issues detailed below do not account for all neutral coverage, but rather identify broad patterns in coverage.

### Asylum seekers and refugees

Between a third to a half of both estates' neutral coverage concerned asylum seekers and refugees on the estates. Some of these articles merely mentioned the asylum seeker population of either estate without elaboration, often in the context of an assessment of broader asylum seeker policies. The rest of these articles discussed particular individuals or families in the following contexts:

- **Dawn raids.** Both Sighthill and Red Road were witness to raids on the homes of individuals and families who had had their asylum applications rejected. Such coverage also included community responses, such as protests, vigils or 'dawn patrols', in support of those seeking asylum.
- **Deportations.** Often related to the above, some neutral articles focused on deportation cases, including appeals of those whose asylum application had been rejected.

The situation of particular refugees or asylum seekers was sometimes discussed in a way unrelated to conditions on the estates. For instance, during 1999 the majority of Red Road's neutral coverage focused on the circumstances of Kosovar refugees who had fled their homes and been housed on the estate. In 2001 some neutral articles about Sighthill discussed Firsat Dag's murder without giving an impression of the estate.

### Other neutral coverage of Sighthill

Sighthill was infrequently mentioned in the neutral contexts of GHA regeneration surveys and plans, GoWell study areas and potential Commonwealth Games sites. Some neutral articles in 2009 also discussed plans to close primary schools and nurseries across Glasgow, including Sighthill Primary, while in 2010 and 2011 neutral coverage included discussion of the Sighthill Stone Circle.

Some neutral articles about Red Road focused on people, often celebrities, who lived or used to live on the estate. Some also discussed arts projects or community centres that gave no impression of the wider estate. Two neutral topics unique to Red Road's coverage were the Andrea Arnold film *Red Road*, which was often merely described as being set on the estate, and the height of the high-rise flats, 'Europe's tallest homes at just over 328ft'.



## DIFFERENTIATED PORTRAYAL OF ISSUES

As well as there being differences in the types of stories linked to each estate, certain topics were portrayed differently depending on whether Red Road or Sighthill was being covered. By examining these portrayals, one can identify different narratives for each estate that have evolved and been repeated over time in newspaper coverage. These narratives emphasise certain characteristics or events and when repeated provide a recognisable and easy-to-digest image of the estates to readers.

Here, we will consider four dominant issues across the two estates:

- Asylum seekers, refugees and racism
- Profiles and historical narratives
- Demolition and regeneration
- High-rise living

### Asylum seekers, refugees and racism

Both Red Road and Sighthill have large asylum seeker and refugee populations in roughly equal cumulative proportions. Despite this similarity, coverage of asylum seeker and refugee-related issues in the case of each estate has been dramatically different.

- **There have been a far greater number of articles referencing asylum seekers and refugees in Sighthill than in Red Road.**

This was the case even before the murder of Firsat Dag in August 2001, although that event widened the gap. While this disparity did reverse somewhat in 2010 as a result of the suicides of an asylum seeking family living in Red Road, it remains to be seen if this shift will be more than temporary.



The housing of Kosovar refugees in Red Road in 1999 led to increased coverage of that estate. Papers portrayed the refugees as sympathetic figures, having fled a well-covered war and subsequently been housed in 'notorious' drug-infested flats with a history of problems. When coverage of the war in Kosovo ended so too did coverage of refugees, giving the impression the refugees had either all left or had 'integrated'.

This contrasts sharply with coverage of Sighthill in the context of a new dispersal policy which saw thousands of asylum seekers transported from London to Glasgow. From the earliest mention of this situation in March 2000, stories included local resident resentment of perceived preferential treatment of asylum seekers, portrayals of refugees as 'ungrateful', intimidation and racism towards asylum seekers and attempts at integration between asylum seekers and tenants. These issues were almost entirely covered in a Sighthill rather than a Red Road context.

- **By the end of 2001, Sighthill had become the frame of reference for discussing the problems of asylum seeker dispersal, settlement and integration in Scotland.**

In 2001, articles frequently referenced assaults on asylum seekers and 'racial tension' in Sighthill, even in stories unrelated to asylum seekers. Sighthill was described as gaining a reputation for intolerance and playing host to a crisis of relations between asylum seekers and other residents. After Firsat Dag's murder, Sighthill was portrayed as having a problem of racism on a scale quite unlike the rest of Glasgow or Scotland. Journalists and interviewees described Dag's murder as inevitable given that tensions had been building for months. Until at least 2007, Firsat Dag's murder and the political and social responses that followed were the primary reasons for Sighthill being discussed in newspapers.

In stark contrast to Sighthill, coverage of Red Road in the 2001-2004 period dropped sharply and remained low. The estate was no longer referenced in discussions of asylum seekers, refugees or racism. Until 2010 the majority of Red Road coverage had been unrelated to these issues.

The difference in treatment of Sighthill-related and Red Road-related asylum seeker issues in this period can be demonstrated through specific examples. In May 2001, newspapers reported a Scottish Refugee Council estimate that there had been 70 attacks on asylum seekers so far that year in Sighthill and Red Road. By July, with increasing coverage of 'racial tension' and assaults in Sighthill, papers referred only to '70 attacks in Sighthill' and omitted Red Road. Later in the year it emerged that the man convicted of Firsat Dag's murder had also allegedly assaulted Barzan Amini in Red Road in March 2001, yet this was never picked up by newspapers as a story worthy of extended coverage or as reflective of growing racism on that estate. This is despite the fact that Firsat Dag's murderer himself was noted by newspapers as being from Barmulloch and not Sighthill.

- **While the 2010 suicides of a Russian asylum seeking family led to increased coverage of asylum seekers in Red Road, the coverage was very different to that in Sighthill.**

Following the 2010 suicides, newspapers focused on the idea of refugees in Red Road coping with deprivation, bad living conditions and the systemic pressures of the asylum application process, while Red Road tenants were portrayed as standing in solidarity with refugees. Unlike with Sighthill, anti-refugee racism and previous attacks on asylum seekers in Red Road were not considered relevant to recent events by newspapers.

The difference in newspapers' attention and characterisation of asylum seeker issues in each estate is reflected in present day coverage. The asylum seeker population of Sighthill and the narrative of 'overcoming racial tensions' following Firsat Dag's murder are often mentioned in articles about the estate as a way of providing context; even for stories unrelated to asylum seekers, from demolition and regeneration plans to acts of violence that have no racial motivation and do not involve asylum seekers.

By contrast, discussions of problems associated with living in Red Road rarely mention asylum seekers and refugees or relations between them and other residents. While the Sighthill community is often described as multicultural or multi-ethnic and as having adapted to this aspect of itself post-2001, for the most part Red Road's multicultural identity has been a non-story.

## Profiles and historical narratives

Newspapers often publish short histories or extended profiles of an estate, sometimes based on on-site journalism, as a way of providing context for a developing story. Sighthill and Red Road share particular qualities that might be considered relevant to such histories and profiles: both are 1960s public housing schemes with relatively high levels of deprivation which have recently acquired significant asylum seeker populations. Yet despite these similarities, the profiles and historical narratives of these estates have been remarkably different.

- **While profiles and historical narratives of Sighthill are relatively infrequent and focus on tenant-refugee relations, Red Road regularly receives profile and historical coverage focusing on the construction of the flats and their subsequent 1970s-80s decline.**

From mid-2001 onwards, Sighthill coverage has consistently been framed in the context of relations between tenants and asylum seekers/refugees. Early on-site profiles of the estate involved tenants arguing they aren't all racist, and refugees describing intimidation and abuse on the estate. Since 2001, these relations are portrayed as having improved, with brief historical narratives providing context for Sighthill articles by describing a move from the 'racial tensions' of 2001 to the estate 'embracing' its multi-ethnic mix. Newspapers rarely give an historical view of Sighthill extending further back than the asylum dispersal of 2000. Longer term on-site profiles of the estate have been rare; even in the period up to and following Firsat Dag's murder, newspapers rarely had journalists write long pieces based on resident interviews in Sighthill.

Profiles and brief historical narratives of Red Road have been published much more frequently. Newspapers have consistently published a brief historical narrative of the estate to contextualise a breaking Red Road story. This begins by stating Red Road was 'hailed ... as the solution to Glasgow's post-war housing problems' when first built but that 'problems soon emerged' in the 1970s concerning vandalism, security and living conditions.

Unlike the relayed history of Sighthill, which begins with the asylum dispersal of 2000, the narrative of Red Road's history begins with the construction of the high-rises in the late 1960s and almost always ends in the 1980s (when two of the high-rises were declared unfit for habitation). Also unlike Sighthill, Red Road's historical narrative often merited its own article.

After plans were announced in 2005 to demolish the Red Road flats, and the Andrea Arnold film *Red Road* was released in 2006, at least one newspaper a year would devote a large article or even a series of articles to Red Road, including its history, on-site resident interviews, journalists' impressions of the estate and expert opinions on the flats. These long pieces involved journalists and residents describing the deterioration of the estate and the problems of high-rise living, as well as memories of living in the flats and specific events on the estate in the past. Interviewees would often frame these accounts in nostalgic terms, of remembering a time when the estate was held in high regard as an improvement on tenements. These profiles rarely included discussion of or interviews with asylum seekers on the estate.

Given the very specific characteristics associated with each estate in journalistic assessments, it would seem the purpose of an on-site profile is not to provide a more complete picture of an estate but to confirm already-established media perceptions.

## Demolition and regeneration

The prospect of the demolition of public housing in both Red Road and Sighthill was first raised in 2001 as a possible result of a council housing stock transfer. Both estates were described as possessing some of the ‘worst multi-storeys’ in Glasgow. In the following years, however, Red Road became the go-to example – from the use of photos of Red Road to on-site profiles and interviews – when journalists discussed the problem of housing in Glasgow and the possibility that the ‘worst’ of the high-rises would be demolished.

Since demolition and regeneration plans for both estates were announced within a few months of each other in 2005, a comparison of the coverage of these announcements is instructive.

- **The demolition and regeneration plans for Red Road have led to increasing regular overviews of the estate’s history and legacy.**

The announcement of plans to demolish the Red Road flats in March 2005 resulted in long articles across the rest of the year. These articles focused on the problems that residents associated with living on the estate and on resident feelings of nostalgia for the time before these problems had emerged. The demolition plans were portrayed as a big change for Glasgow as a whole and the ‘end of an era’.

- **Plans for Sighthill have not resulted in similar coverage, having only been significantly covered in relation to further demolition announcements and contested resident opinion on demolition.**

When investment and demolition plans were announced for Sighthill in April and July 2005, articles were generally much shorter, focusing mainly on the nature of the investment and wider Glasgow regeneration plans. Unlike with Red Road, these articles also mentioned the asylum seeker population of Sighthill and outlined the recent history of the estate as one of ‘racial tension’ moving towards the ‘breaking down of barriers’.

After the demolition announcements in 2005, articles discussing a regeneration project in another area of Glasgow frequently listed both Sighthill and Red Road as being part of GHA’s Transformational Regeneration Areas. When an article focused only on the demolition of high-rises rather than regeneration, however, Red Road was often singled out on its own as an example of such a demolition project already being planned. Twice as many articles on demolition plans in an area of Glasgow referred to Red Road than referred to Sighthill or both estates.

While demolition plans for Red Road have been referenced annually up to 2011 in long profile pieces on the estate, Sighthill's demolition plans have been covered less frequently and in smaller articles only up to 2009, mainly in relation to further GHA announcements of plans to demolish flats in the area and to resident campaigning in opposition to these plans.

## High-rise living

Throughout the period analysed, housing in both Red Road and Sighthill has largely consisted of high-rise flats. The decision to demolish tower blocks in both estates has been justified with reference to professed negative aspects of high-rise living. Yet the way high-rise living has been discussed in Red Road is quite distinct to the way it has been discussed in Sighthill.

- **Unlike Sighthill, Red Road has frequently been portrayed as emblematic of the failures of 1960s high-rise housing.**

While Sighthill and Red Road have been mentioned together as representing Glasgow's 'notorious high-rise schemes', Red Road alone has been more frequently described in these terms. Since demolition plans were announced, Red Road has been presented in journalistic assessments of high-rises as emblematic both of the problems with living in high-rises and of the failed promise of 1960s multi-storey public housing. Accounts of the Red Road estate frequently discuss the poor design and planning of the high-rises and their poor living conditions.

Journalistic assessments of high-rise living do not mention high-rises in Sighthill or interview Sighthill flat residents, as they do Red Road tenants. Coverage of Sighthill demolition plans and resident opposition to them have rarely discussed the problems or benefits of high-rise living, except insofar as residents justify their opposition to demolition by noting the safety and security of high-rise residence, claims disputed a small number of times by reader letters in 2009.



## CONCLUSIONS

Here we draw out some conclusions from the comparative analysis relevant to attempts by regeneration agencies to alter or shape the future image and reputation of these or other housing estates.

- **There is no guarantee that estates in similar circumstances will be treated in the same way by the press.**

The housing estates of Sighthill and Red Road have important physical and social traits in common. Both have a history of public housing focused on high-rise tower blocks, both represent the poorer end of inequality in Glasgow, and both have recently housed large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees. Yet despite these similarities, the two estates have consistently been portrayed differently by newspapers, demonstrating that there is no guarantee that two estates with shared characteristics in one city will be approached in a similar way by local newspapers.

- **Newspapers develop a dominant narrative about a place, which they repeat and use as a frame for future stories about the area.**

The primary characteristic associated with each estate is different. For the three newspapers analysed, the primary noteworthy characteristic of Sighthill has been its asylum seeker and refugee population, also sometimes described as the multi-ethnic or multicultural character of the Sighthill community. Emphasis on this aspect of the estate grew out of newspapers' 2001 coverage of asylum seekers in Sighthill, and particularly of growing intimidation and racially-motivated attacks. The long-lasting effect of this early coverage is that Sighthill's multi-ethnicity is historicised as once fostering 'racial tension' but now increasingly being accepted and embraced.

By contrast, the primary noteworthy characteristic of Red Road has been its high-rise tower blocks. This emphasis likely existed before the period of analysis, with the historical frame of reference for Red Road stretching from the construction of the high-rises in the 1960s to their deterioration in the 1970s and 1980s. The high flats of Red Road are portrayed as 'iconic' in the context of Glasgow's history of high-rises, particularly due to the record height of Red Road's tower blocks.

In one respect, it could be said that Glasgow-based newspapers have treated Red Road and Sighthill the same: they have devoted the majority of their coverage of both estates to negative articles focusing on violence, crime and the poor environment. Nevertheless, the narrative frames of 'refugee-tenant relations' in Sighthill and 'iconic high-rise failure' in Red Road have shaped the way these topics are related to each estate. Reports on violence, crime and poor

environment are often framed by these narratives to give breaking stories or estate profiles an air of familiarity and continuity with previous coverage. Consequently, images of the estates that have already been established are maintained when covering new events. For instance, an act of violence in Sighthill provides an opportunity to discuss the estate's asylum seeker population, while regeneration efforts designed to deal with deprivation in Red Road allow a retelling of the high-rise flats' history of failed ambition and deterioration.

- **Newspapers have used the estates to make different political points about wider issues. This makes it harder to shift the reputation of an estate as its enduring negative image is used by the press for wider purposes, irrespective of what is going on currently, or has since transpired on the estate.**

Since 2001, Sighthill has been a key reference point for the problems of asylum seeker dispersal, settlement and integration in Glasgow and Scotland. Journalists frequently use Sighthill as an example of the failure of council and national asylum policy, in placing asylum seekers in deprived areas without providing enough information to other residents. Red Road, meanwhile, appears to be a prime reference point for the problems of high-rise living, as well as for the failed ideals of Glasgow's 1960s public housing programme. Despite the historical nature of this latter framing, the high-rise living problems associated with Red Road's flats are portrayed as having persisted to this day.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR REGENERATION

- **Efforts to regenerate and improve places should recognise the potential role the media can play, particularly in relation to the public image and reputation of places. Regeneration strategies should therefore incorporate positive image strategies and these should identify, acknowledge, build upon and engage with the dominant narratives about places developed and used by the press.**

The dominant narrative frames we identified have affected coverage of demolition and regeneration programmes. Both estates are regularly mentioned in discussion of Glasgow-wide regeneration plans. When focusing on the specific regeneration plans of the two estates, however, newspapers devoted greater attention to Red Road, due largely to its perceived iconic status in Glasgow's history and skyline. High-rise demolition has become a regularly covered story in Red Road, leading to repeated discussion of the estate's history and legacy. Sighthill received much less regeneration coverage after plans were announced, as the primary story of the estate in previous years

was not deterioration or high-rise living but race relations, something seemingly unconnected to regeneration. It took resident opposition to demolition for Sighthill's regeneration programme to gain more attention.

The ubiquity of these primary characteristics or stories indicates that, in an important sense, they are now an integral part of the two estates' reputations. What this means is that any attempt to change the estates' negative reputations needs to take these characteristics into account. This would have to go beyond merely generating a greater number of positive articles. For one thing, news stories that might have mitigated explicitly negative coverage have often been framed by narratives that are themselves negative – of Sighthill as recovering from racial tension and Red Road as home to Glasgow's deteriorated high-rise failures.

If the aim is to change the negative reputations of estates such as Sighthill and Red Road, it is important to note that positive coverage and positive-leaning mixed coverage of each estate have also been shaped to an extent by these primary characteristics and stories. However, it is also the case that perhaps if there was more focus on the benefits of regeneration for Sighthill and Red Road, then the perceived importance of past events such as 'racial tension' or 'high-rise deterioration' might be lessened.

However, trying to change the estates' reputations does not necessarily have to involve trying to get rid of newspapers' narrative frames, a task that would likely be very difficult. Instead, these stories and characteristics could be used by regeneration agencies to refer to the estates in more positive ways.

For example, the announcement of regeneration plans for Red Road led to increased coverage of the estate, much of which is mixed with positive leanings. Clearly the image of the Red Road flats as 'iconic' has encouraged newspapers to commit long pieces to the estate now that its housing is to be dramatically changed. This commitment is an opportunity to create more positive coverage by emphasising both the importance of Red Road in Glasgow's public housing history and to highlight that the problems associated with the high-rise are being removed and the estate is being transformed through the provision of an equally radical residential structure for the future, namely mixed-form, mixed tenure dwellings.

Sighthill too has had its more positive coverage affected by its primary narrative. The association of Sighthill with asylum seeker settlement issues has resulted in positive-leaning coverage of integration and pro-multicultural initiatives. This coverage could be pursued further to promote the image of Sighthill as an area that embraces its diversity through community activities and celebrations, seeking to achieve a future as a successful multicultural community.





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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)

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## **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*