



Kent Coastal Network

Towards integration on the Kent Coast

This topic paper is part of a KCC coordinated project to develop an Integrated Coastal Action Plan for Kent. The aim is to generate wider discussion and a consultation response form accompanies it.

Title: - Regeneration and Coastal Towns

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Introduction

The regeneration and coastal towns theme can best be understood as the need to improve environmental, economic and social conditions of a place and community through a range of complementary and positive interventions and long-term investments.

East Kent and the Thames Gateway Kent have different histories and therefore experience differing issues and these are explored and addressed in this topic paper.

To be effective, long-term regeneration of coastal towns must address both the physical and non-physical aspect of activity. Physical regeneration would include targeted interventions to provide the following outputs:

- cleaning up of contaminated brown field sites
- promotion and delivery of housing and job creation schemes
- delivery of transport infrastructure to increase accessibility and also land values
- investment in public realm, heritage and open space for biodiversity, landscape, accessibility and water resource management

Associated non-physical regeneration activity could include investment in training and skills, community capacity building, marketing and promotion, and schemes to promote greater involvement and community pride. All of these interrelated activities need to be tailored to meet the changing needs of coastal towns and their communities plus also to ensure real sustainability in the environmental as well as social and economic context. As specifically stated in the Regional Economic Strategy in relation to East Kent sub region – there must be a balance against the need to manage and enhance an outstanding coastal landscape.

This topic paper

- Summarises the Regeneration and Coastal Towns theme for the Kent coast.
- Invites comment from representatives involved in this area of concern, the responses will be used to ensure a well informed and supported plan is developed.

Policies, programmes and partnerships

To achieve coastal regeneration goals, regeneration interests are steered by national, regional and local policies, programmes and partnerships. As such, this topic paper is consistent with:

- the South East Plan (draft),
- the Regional Economic Strategy,
- the Report on Coastal Towns (CLG)
- the Coastal South East: A Framework for Action
- Multi Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships.

It also has to be considered in association with local strategies such as Kent Thameside and the Medway Waterfront strategies, Dover Pride etc

For consistency, the identification of coastal urban units relates to the breakdown of the coastal contour as established in the South East Regional plan (draft). As such, this topic paper will focus on:

- (i) East Kent (and Ashford)
- (ii) Thames Gateway Kent.

Why coastal towns and why regeneration?

The Government's coastal towns report as published in March 2007 states that the Government has neglected the needs of coastal town for too long and that a greater understanding of the challenges facing them is required. It recognises that a "one size fits all approach" national strategy for coastal towns is not suitable thus making space of sub regional and county level consideration.

The report summaries the following shared issues as faced by coastal towns:

- (i) Peripheral locations which are exacerbated by weak transport links
- (ii) The impact on the economy of changing tourism trends
- (iii) High levels of seasonal employment
- (iv) A relatively high number of old and young people
- (v) A large number of private rented houses, and houses in poor conditions, both associated with the legacy of traditional seaside tourism and guesthouses
- (vi) A relatively high proportion of low-income households
- (vii) Relatively low levels of education attainment lower life expectancy and higher rates of homelessness acceptances.

The seven numbered points above make clear the need for generic regeneration activities. They also provide an important contemporary context that future regeneration activities must address.

When comparing the above issues to those faced in Kent's coastal contour it is clear that East Kent and the Thames Gateway Kent have different histories and therefore experience differing issues. For example, East Kent's coastal towns (Whitstable, Herne Bay, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone) share a past based on tourism both local and as channel crossing points. As such issues (ii), (iii) and (v) are particularly relevant and must influence the positive regenerational response. In contrast, the urban settlements within the Thames Gateway Kent (Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Sittingbourne / Sheerness) have a strong industrial and commercial past and issues (i), (iv), (vi) and (vii) may be more relevant to understanding the regeneration drivers and outputs.

Players:

Strategic key partners who are working together to support regeneration goals include; South East England Development Agency, Homes and Community Agency, Communities and Local Government, Local Authorities, Natural England, English Heritage, Arts Council England...

Projects:

Coastal towns around Kent have long experienced change. Their relationship to major cities such as London has changed dramatically in the past and the impact of transport infrastructure and governmental regenerational policies continue to influence coastal activities. These interests have already been set out in the Industry topic paper.

The relationship between communities and the coast is also dynamic. Kent Thames Gateway has seen the regeneration of key waterfront areas throughout Medway and Gravesham. Now Queenborough and Rushenden are set to benefit from positive regeneration. Redundant employment sites have been reconstructed to provide a positive setting for new homes, jobs and communities.

Dartford Creek and Riverside area has a strong vision focused on transforming a previously underinvested landscape to provide a new face for Dartford's commercial and residential future. Whitstable continues to develop and exploit a strong brand focusing on its live fishing industry and associated heritage within a safe and attractive coastal strip.

Thanet continues to promote its strengths as a coastal retail and tourist destination of choice rather than necessity. A strong focus on its Dickens heritage and an associated investment in Margate's Turner Contemporary give an indication to future opportunity. With a strong focus on the coastal zone between Sandwich and Deal, the Natural East Kent initiative continues to explore opportunities to create large natural landscapes for wildlife and people. Dover Pride, amongst others areas, continues to focus on physical regeneration at Dover Waterfront and Folkestone and has looked to forge a

strong brand as the Kent coastal town that is supporting arts related cultural activities.

Poor perception is an issue for some coastal towns in Kent as much as the reality and positive promotion high quality coastal environment is an area that needs to be worked on.

SEEDA's coastal framework identifies the regional development agency's contribution to coastal regeneration. It promotes schemes such as the Coastal Towns Network and use of the Regeneration Handbook. Margate and Dover are SEEDA's coastal town regeneration priorities with a key task being the need to promote complementary competition between areas and interests.

The above are all long-term initiatives set to improve the quality of life and the environment of Kent's coast. A key role for this Action plan is to support, prioritise and publicise regeneration that meets the needs of coastal communities, coastal businesses and coastal biodiversity and landscape.

In its present form, SEEDA's Coastal South East Framework for Action (March 07) is not explicit in its valuing of the coast protected and non-protected environmental assets. This therefore creates an obvious remit for the Kent Integrated Coastal Action in addressing such imbalances.

The recommendations of this Action plan should be reflected and delivered by all other regeneration strategies and policies.

Integration of "Regeneration and Coastal Towns" with other Kent Coast themes

The well-informed and integrated regeneration of coastal towns and industries should by definition support the delivery of positive long-term public benefits for the themes as listed below. (However – see policy directions...)

Biodiversity - Regeneration opportunities are associated with Living Landscape, Thames Gateway Parklands and Natural East Kent. Delivering planning policy guidance – reflective of AONB. Biodiversity is too often seen as an aspirational constraint. Conflicts may occur when redeveloping brown field sites (direct loss of habitat and species) and through the promotion of increased opportunities for marinas and leisure boating (bird disturbance).

Biodiversity players should work to promote a more positive integrated approach as developed by Kent Wildlife Trust with their seconded officer working across North Kent and RSPB's officer working alongside Port of London Authority.

Sensitive enhancements to brown field sites and reuse of low quality urban fringe areas through regeneration should help improve environment and deliver benefits for biodiversity.

Geology and Geomorphology - This has most significance in terms of landscape appeal. Also the intrinsic appeal of the built environment; new regeneration projects should where possible, use local materials and stone to maintain the identity of an area.

Historic Environment – English Heritage work to inform all actions – historic assets are already strongly recognised as a regeneration strength – Faversham, Whitstable, Broadstairs, Dover Castle, Folkestone Leas...

Industry - There are clear parallels and interdependencies here with Kent industries being there to deliver and benefit from regeneration projects.

However, threats need to be examined too; some industrial developments may have a negative effect on environmental or social pride aspects of the regeneration theme.

Quality of the Water Environment - The run off of pollutants from the built environment is a problem than should be addressed, especially in the design and location of new developments.

Recreation - Generally a positive fit, but the needs of this sector should be properly integrated into regeneration projects – e.g. demand for marinas etc. This theme has a strong link with the tourism theme too.

Shoreline Management – Regeneration projects need to take account of sea level rise/climate change and link in with the SMP process; aspirations that may contradict or weaken the SMP need to be identified.

Tourism and the Visitor Economy - positive relationship – a key beneficiary as well as driver of coordinated regeneration programmes.

Policy directions for “Regeneration and Coastal Towns” on the Kent coast

1. As the author of this topic paper I suggest that coastal planners and policy makers already have adequate understanding of the ICZM issues relating to biodiversity, historic environment and say shoreline management. Therefore is the real gap how aware and how engaged are the non-regenerational players in the goals and desires of the regeneration partnerships?
2. Also, what are the different partners key regeneration priorities for Kent and how can Kent’s coastal zone play a strong role in achieving these priorities? Are they complementary?
3. Is there a SWOT analysis of coastal towns and communities available to inform interdependent policies for area specific interventions? What does Thanet need that supports local sustainable growth while complementing but not competing with Dover or Herne Bay / Whitstable’s interests?

Do we have an active, well informed and high level Coastal Regeneration forum to help integrate work areas, budgets?

Credit:

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