

CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of an issue which has recently emerged. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of the issue, thus creating a quick and easy to read document which directs to more detailed material, if required.

# CLES BULLETIN





## Introduction

In December 2005 the ODPM select committee announced an inquiry to examine the case for special initiatives to address the needs of coastal towns. The enquiry will consider the effectiveness with which the Government and indeed the ODPM are addressing the social, housing and environmental problems facing coastal towns. It will evaluate where the programmes being undertaken in coastal areas are effective, well focused and adequately funded and examine whether there is a case for more specific regional initiatives. In light of the inquiry and the need to ensure that benefits of regeneration are extended to coastal towns and the growing interest in skills for regeneration, this bulletin seeks to:

- Examine the challenges facing coastal areas, in terms of economic disparities, employment related challenges, social issues and environmental concerns.
- Consider the policy responses, past and present and why coastal areas seem, largely, to have fallen through the net;
- Frame the needs of coastal towns within the new localism agenda;
- Look at the skills deficit that exists around coastal regeneration; and

By way of a conclusion, this bulletin will offer potential routes forward for our coastal communities and those that manage them.

## The challenges

The coast is the most dynamic, sensitive and perhaps least understood of our natural environments. Britain's coastal areas have some of the most spectacular scenery and wildlife in the country, and clearly, as an island, Britain also has strong historic and cultural links with the sea. For many it is an attractive place to live and work. However, it is also an area with its own special economic and social challenges. The social, environmental and economic issues facing regeneration practitioners in coastal towns are complex and interrelated. Like many of our urban areas the impact of economic restructuring and globalisation was felt deeply in our coastal towns in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was accompanied and exacerbated by changing patterns of mass tourism, which together acted as a considerable blow to many of our coastal towns. Coastal towns also face added challenges related to their isolated geographical position and inadequate and outdated infrastructure as well as social and economic phenomena, such as easily available cheap accommodation and large elderly populations.

However, whilst our urban areas, and more recently rural areas, have made headway with regard to regeneration and renewal, many coastal areas have largely continued to stagnate. Of the 88 most deprived areas, as identified by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2004), 21 are coastal areas<sup>1</sup>. This is illustrated by table below, which indicates the relative deprivation experienced in coastal areas by giving the relative national positions of all coastal NRF areas in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004).

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<sup>1</sup> The list of 88 NRF areas can be viewed at: <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=613>



Areas (alphabetical) <sup>2</sup>	Rank
Barrow in Furness	29
Blackpool	24
Brighton and Hove	83
Bristol	67
Gateshead	26
Great Yarmouth	70
Hartlepool	14
Hastings	38
Kerrier	87
Kingston upon Hull	9
Liverpool	1
Newcastle	20
N. Tyneside	80
Penwith	58
Portsmouth	88
Redcar and Cleveland	44
Sefton	78
S. Tyneside	27
Stockton on Tees	75
Sunderland	22
Wirral	48

As outlined above, there are a multitude of challenges facing coastal communities all of which will need to be addressed in order to ensure a sustainable future; environmental, social and economic, for these areas.

The challenges facing coastal areas can be grouped into four categories, namely:

- Economic disparities;
- Employment-related challenges;
- Social issues; and
- Environmental concerns.

### **Economic disparities**

Throughout the 1980s many urban areas in Britain, including some coastal areas, were the subject of substantial physical renewal, however this was largely focused on the big cities such as Liverpool and Glasgow and dealt with the affects of large scale industrial economic restructuring, for example in the docking and shipping related industries. In the 1990s this gave way to coastal projects, which sought to reclaim coastal areas from post-industrial dereliction and boost tourist and visitor numbers and was centred on the creation of hallmark venues, such as the Albert Dock in Liverpool. However, this did little to tackle deep-seated inequalities and address the health, educational, housing, environmental and employment related deprivation that existed and continues to exist within our coastal towns.

Existing economic disparities are also exacerbated by a lack of infrastructure investment. Seaside infrastructure requires substantial capital investment for regeneration and refurbishment, without which the fragile structure of many resort towns will remain attuned to the past rather than facing the future, and will suffer from associated socio-economic problems. For example, run-down coastal settlements are not synonymous with enterprise location and business development, and this drop in business confidence, continues to make coastal communities disadvantaged in the competition for non-coast related development.

Falling visitor numbers is also a problem in many coastal areas. In 1996 over 50% of the population took at least one day-trip to the coast. Despite the natural assets and recreational potential of coastal

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)



towns, this figure continues to decline quite steadily in the face of stiff competition from more exotic resorts. Consequently, many seaside resorts are characterised by long-term market decline, about which there has been little central Government activity.<sup>3</sup>

### Employment-related challenges

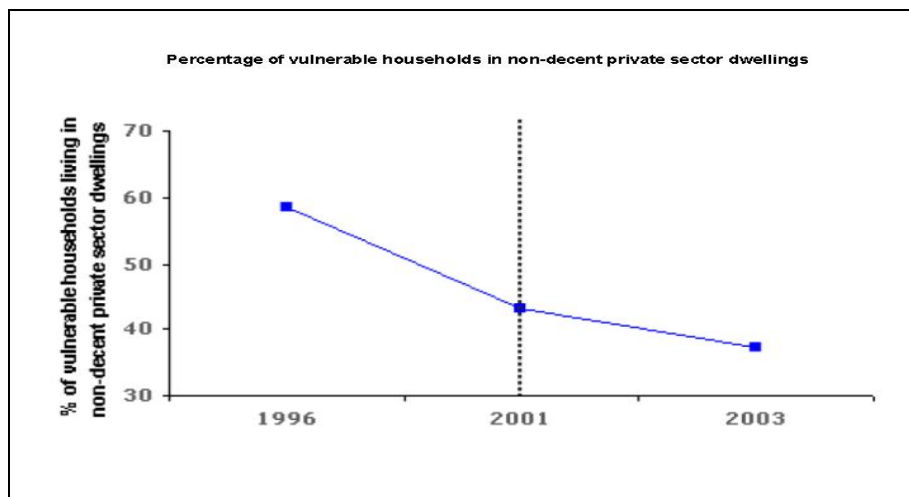
The traditional dominant sectors in coastal areas, particularly tourism, are typified by low paid jobs with disproportionately high numbers of people in part-time and seasonal employment. High seasonal employment/unemployment creates peaks and troughs in the employment figures of coastal areas and has the effect of masking high levels of long-term unemployment. Together these factors stall the development of a sustainable local economy and make it difficult to plan interventions and programmes to counter this stagnation of the economy.

### Social and population issues

Many coastal areas are also characterised by a transient population, often comprising migrant workers, teenage parents and the long term unemployed, influenced by the availability of cheap, short-term accommodation. This further complicates the challenges in coastal towns, and puts even greater importance on the design of holistic, targeted interventions.

For example, Figure 1 illustrates the significant achievements made towards reducing the number of non decent privately owned houses across the country but Figure 2 shows the problem that remains with dwelling quality in Brighton and Hove, compared with the non-coastal, NRF area of Luton. This is partially explained by the high number of Houses of Multiple Occupancy in Brighton and Hove, which currently stands at 5 times the regional average, and private rentals in the city (a fifth of all households in the city are rented from a private landlord), which are more than double the average for the South East.

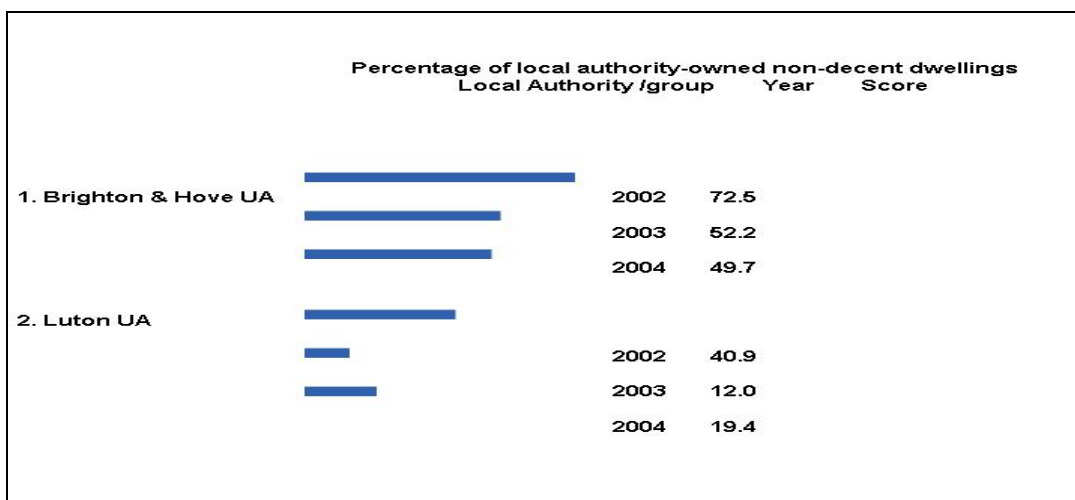
**Figure 1**



Source: Floor Targets Interactive

**Figure 2.**

<sup>3</sup> Except with the nationally instigated and locally operated Tourism Development Action Plans, which by their very nature did not attempt to tackle the full breadth of issues affecting coastal areas.



Source: Floor Targets Interactive

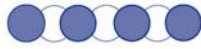
In addition to a transient working population and high number of unemployed people, coastal areas are also often home to a higher proportion of residents above pensionable age. There is a net outflow of high education attainers and skilled workers, often referred to as the brain drain. All of which results in a weakened labour market that struggles to attract employers with a range of employment opportunities and also fails to create a sustainable mixed community, both of which are crucial in coastal areas with stagnating economies. Instead, it attracts even greater numbers of transient workers and older people.

Furthermore, there are a variety of health, education, and housing related inequalities suffered by coastal communities, as identified by the indices of multiple deprivation and in some towns, significant drug and alcohol related issues, associated with club and drinking cultures. All of which further add to the challenge of creating a sustainable economy.

### **Environmental concerns**

Environmental concerns, such as pollution, sea level rises and coastal erosion accompanied by pressure for development, particularly in the South East as regard to new housing, have combined to create substantial environmental challenges in many areas. This is further complicated by the geographically isolated location and poor transport links of many coastal areas, which serve to disconnect the coastal town from its hinterland. Moreover, more specific environmental initiatives have focused on maintaining biodiversity, promoting environmental sustainability and controlling development in and around England's coastline. Mechanisms have included Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) strategies and Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) which were led by local authorities but did not, and were not positioned to be able to, tackle the social and economic problems affecting liveability issues in coastal areas.

Furthermore, local authorities and other statutory agencies suffer due to the degree of confusion about responsibilities on the coast. This is exacerbated by a complex system of management for areas beyond the beach and below and around the waterline and the division of responsibilities for sea defense (inundation by the sea) and coastal protection (erosion). All of which involve a range of partners including, local authorities, the crown Estate, the Department for Environment, Fisheries and



Rural Affairs (Defra), the Environment Agency and individual harbour authorities, and subsequently often results in dislocated policy making and activity.

All of this indicates the need for a specific policy or set of policies, aimed at dealing with the needs of coastal towns and aimed at spearheading regeneration activity in these areas. As we have seen the nature of deprivation in coastal areas continues to be specific and severe and, largely, has not been affected by the various policy developments that have taken place in the last two decades. In the following section we will examine these policies in more detail.

### **The Policy Context - why coastal towns have fallen through the gap?**

Although different Government departments have separate policies for the different areas of the coast and its communities relating to their specific area of work, there is no one single policy and no one body to co-ordinate the variety that currently exists. In short, these communities have largely fallen through the net in terms of effective policy making and in relation to equality of opportunity and quality of life. There is no comprehensive framework to co-ordinate the implementation of social, economic and environmental regeneration in coastal areas. Thus explaining why coastal towns form almost one quarter of the 88 the most deprived areas in England. The government expectation of local authorities and other agencies to work together on a voluntary basis, informed by an understanding of national and regional issues has resulted in a policy vacuum that leaves local authorities with little or no effective guidance on how to deal with the many complex issues in an integrated manner.

Despite not having a dedicated policy and strategy nationally, Single Regeneration Budget programmes such as 'Creating Opportunities in Blackpool'<sup>4</sup> and 'North Tyneside@Work'<sup>5</sup> and Millennium Communities' projects have attempted to tackle the problems facing coastal towns. Projects such as the 'Turning the tide'<sup>6</sup> programme in County Durham sought to make environmental improvements to a string of ex-coalfield areas on the County Durham coast thereby creating a more attractive environment and making it into a location in which new industry would wish to invest.

The Neighborhood Renewal Fund, which has been in operation since 2001, and is the primary scheme working to affect change in deprived communities operates in 21 coastal areas around England. It is the prime mechanism with which coastal communities and local and central government are trying to regenerate both urban and rural areas. Like much Government policy since 1997, the NRF focuses on the need for communities and local partners to be involved in deciding on the actions necessary in their communities and ultimately seeks to narrow the gap between most deprived areas and the rest of the country. However, it is not sufficiently specific to deal comprehensively and effectively with the needs of coastal towns.

Whilst successes have been visible in some coastal areas with regard to specific issues, for example educational attainment and quality of non-local authority dwellings, coastal areas still lag significantly behind other areas of the country, and there is still a clear case for further, more specific regeneration activity in England's coastal towns.

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<sup>4</sup> Information about the Blackpool SRB project can be found here: <http://www.nwda.co.uk/RelatedContent.aspx?&area=95&subarea=237>

<sup>5</sup> Information about the SRB project can be found here: <http://www.regenerationexchange.org/region-ntyneside.php>

<sup>6</sup> Information about the Turning the Tide projects can be viewed here: <http://www.turning-the-tide.org.uk/>





The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal<sup>7</sup> is not capable of, looking specifically at the needs of coastal towns. However it is not specifically designed to. In this it does allow for local input as regard priorities and interventions, however, it cannot join together the social and economic policy responses with the infrastructure and environmental-related developments, required to protect against environmental change, natural and man made, which impact so heavily on the ability create a sustainable economic and social climate.

Local authorities have also been unable to play a co-ordinating role in coastal regeneration. This is because of the division of responsibilities across various bodies, which has not been conducive to effective partnership working, and is unlikely to result in a holistic approach to the regeneration needs of coastal towns.

The response from Regional Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies has also been somewhat limited; the needs of coastal towns are only given brief consideration in many Regional Economic Strategies<sup>8</sup> and also Regional Spatial Strategies<sup>9</sup>. Yet regional government could potentially play an important role in highlighting the needs of coastal communities and also in elevating them up the regeneration agenda. They could also play an important role in improving both the perception of, and opportunity for, business investment in these areas.

### **Coastal towns, City regions and new localism**

Clearly the current Government's focus on devolving powers to the local and sub regional level could have a significant impact on the regeneration of some coastal areas. Indeed, the development of city regions could reinvigorate some coastal city areas and reaffirm the link between coastal towns and their hinterland and thereby positively influence transport and spatial planning as it affects coastal towns. For example, the proposed Central Lancashire City Region could reconnect Blackpool with other towns such as Blackburn, Burnley and Preston and thus develop this city regional economy to benefit of both the coastal and non-coastal areas, drawing investment and promoting enterprise and entrepreneurialism across the region. Moreover, the pooling and aligning of funds through Local Area Agreements, which are to be rolled out across all unitary authorities in 2007, could facilitate new working arrangements and a fresh approach to the challenges facing coastal communities, particularly if there is a greater boldness in the willingness of partner agencies to pool significant funds across Local Area Agreements.

### **Skills for Coastal Regeneration**

As we have already seen, the coast is a highly complex environment (both in terms of the challenges it faces, its governance and in terms of its social and natural environment). Consequently it is an extremely challenging area for decision-makers but a well-managed coastal community is dependent on good decision-making and well skilled practitioners. Like regeneration of our urban areas, a mix of skills is required for effective regeneration. This includes both hard and soft skills – that is,

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<sup>7</sup> ODPM (2000), The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, HMSO, London; More information about the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal can viewed here:

<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=611>

<sup>8</sup> Northwest Economic Strategy: [www.http://www.nlgn.org.uk/pdfs/upload/CRCreportFINAL1.pdf](http://www.nlgn.org.uk/pdfs/upload/CRCreportFINAL1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Regional Spatial Strategy for the Northwest:

[http://rpg.nwra.gov.uk/uploads/rpg\\_docs/rp\\_Whls\\_Submitted\\_Draft\\_RSS\\_Jan\\_2006\\_.pdf](http://rpg.nwra.gov.uk/uploads/rpg_docs/rp_Whls_Submitted_Draft_RSS_Jan_2006_.pdf)



respectively, those skills that relate specifically to the coastal environment and regeneration and economic development and also those which facilitate good, partnership working and management of regeneration, such as communication skills, leadership and the ability to create a vision. Moreover, the ability to access appropriate information, and a well-rounded understanding of coastal issues – the matching of science and research with practical, local knowledge, evidence and understanding - are core to designing effective interventions and alleviating some of the problems facing coastal towns.

Effective enterprise development skills and support are also crucial to reviving the local economies of coastal areas. This could be mainstreamed through educational activities, with the additional benefit of ensuring young entrepreneurs remain in the area, or through existing small business support.

Coastal towns require integrated solutions that increase capacity, knowledge and skills. Thus coastal practitioners would benefit from training and skills development, reflecting the holistic needs of coastal management. In addition, an ongoing dialogue is required between local communities, statutory partners, the research community and those with practical responsibilities for coastal communities. This is crucial to creating and mainstreaming a skills support scheme.

### **What needs to be done?**

Currently coastal towns lack a mechanism to draw together all the strands of regeneration activity – a framework for promoting the environmental well-being of the coast, and the sustainable social and economic regeneration of its communities. This is crucial to the creation of a holistic strategy to ensure the sustainable and equitable development of our coastal towns and their communities. Physical renewal and infrastructure development must be connected with the social and economic regeneration and social inclusion work that is being led by the NRF and guided by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. It also needs to be integrated with the environmental measures to control planning and protect the country's coastlines from environmental threats and maintain biodiversity and sustainability. Like the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, this framework could have a national basis, but be informed more directly by local needs and wants. Whatever the form, however, it must take account of local priorities and be informed by local partners, including the VCS and ultimately must be mainstreamed to ensure that it does not rely on additional and specific funds.

The Framework must also set out the responsibilities for each partner agency, more clearly than is currently the case. Local authorities are well placed to provide the basis for the development of stronger partnerships between local authorities, national government, the regional agencies and the private and voluntary sectors. Indeed, several organisations, most vocally the LGA, have argued that a stronger place for local government in coastal management should be created by a specific national policy framework addressing the multitude of interconnected coastal issues.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Core to building sustainable coastal communities is narrowing the gap, restoring visitor numbers, creating economic opportunities, fostering enterprise and ensuring the physical renewal of our coastal communities. This requires a holistic understanding of the needs of coastal towns. It also requires a national framework that is able to deal with all four aspects of the challenges facing coastal

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<sup>10</sup> LGA (2001), On the Edge - The Coastal Strategy [http://www.coastalsig.lga.gov.uk/pdfs/on\\_the\\_edge.pdf](http://www.coastalsig.lga.gov.uk/pdfs/on_the_edge.pdf)





communities: economic disparities; employment-related challenges; social issues; and environmental concerns. This framework must interact with the agenda of new localism and be involved in the development of city regions – harnessing their potential to affect change for the most deprived communities. Finally, it is also important to consider the specific skill sets, both specific to regeneration and related to consultation, leadership, and partnership working, and to understand the knowledge required to effectively plan for change within coastal towns. This increased knowledge must underpin the development of a holistic coastal strategy.

### **Further Resources**

- The LGA coastal issues special interest group  
<http://www.coastalsig.lga.gov.uk/ontheedge.htm>
- The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal  
<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=611>
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