

1. DISTRICT PROFILE

INTRODUCTION

- 1.01 This chapter examines the distinctiveness of the Suffolk Coastal district. It looks at the positive aspects of the district that need to be protected and enhanced, as well as the issues and problems that need to be addressed. It is drawn from:
- The evidence base
 - The District Council's own strategies
 - The results of public engagement and
 - The work of the Local Strategic Partnership
- 1.02 It is divided into the themes of Housing, Economy, Transport, Environment and Community Well-being. Each part closes with a summary of the key issues. Finally, there are the priorities for action as identified by the Local Strategic Partnership in its review of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 1.03 Emerging from this chapter is a Vision for the District in 2025 having addressed the issues raised here. This is accompanied by a set of Objectives that will form the basis of the policies that make up this Core Strategy.

POPULATION AND HOUSING PROFILE

- 1.04 People are at the heart of Suffolk Coastal and in the last 30 years the district has seen its population rise by around 26,000. This represents a 29% increase that is amongst the higher rates of growth in the country. Suffolk Coastal is now home to just over 122,000 people (2006). At just over 21%, Suffolk Coastal is home to a higher proportion of people who are over the age of 65 than nationally or in Suffolk as a whole.
- 1.05 Being able to afford to buy a home is a big issue for many, especially first time buyers. Studies have identified a need in the next 5 years to deliver a minimum of 600 new houses to meet the need for affordable homes in the district and if house prices escalate more than incomes there may well be an increased need. The number of houses that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard (currently 26.1%) needs to be reduced. The number of homeless households with dependant children approaching the Council for assistance has increased in recent years.
- 1.06 The Council continues to work with its housing association partners to secure funding from the Housing Corporation for new affordable housing schemes across the District. This work was successful in securing £3.94 million in April 2008 to assist with the construction or conversion of 147 dwellings. The Council will work with its partners to ensure that future funding opportunities are secured wherever possible in order to meet the affordable/social housing needs of the District. However, such funding is not likely to provide more than a modest proportion of the total requirement for affordable homes. Accordingly, the Council seeks to meet that requirement by requiring that new development of six or more dwellings in towns and three or more in villages must provide for 1 home in 3 to be affordable.
- 1.07 The Regional Spatial Strategy has identified a requirement for 10,200 new homes in the District between 2001 and 2021.
- 1.08 The district attracts many second homeowners (4.4% of the total dwellings at the 2005) or people retiring to the area, especially along the coast. In some parishes the level of second homes reaches as high as 30%.
- 1.09 Gypsies and Romanies constitute a very low proportion of the population; the district is, however, a destination for Travellers.
- 1.10 Key Housing Issues**
- Lack of houses at prices affordable to local people.
 - Lack of social rented housing.
 - Imbalance between housing needs and supply.
 - Second homeowners – denying local people the opportunity to buy units, particularly small ones.
 - Efficient use of land and high densities may not reflect the character of the area.

- Retaining or creating small units of accommodation
- The potential imbalance between the supply of housing and the needs
- Development should be concentrated where access to facilities and services is available
- Lack of authorized provision for Gypsies and Travellers

ECONOMIC PROFILE

- 1.11 The East of England is one of the fastest growing regional economies in the UK and the Regional Economic Strategy identifies goals for regional economic development that have an important bearing on the economy of Suffolk Coastal.
- 1.12 The district supports over 4,000 businesses, a high proportion of which are small and medium sized businesses that are vital to the local economy (70% of the businesses in the District employ 5 people or less). There are also large employers like:
- (i) The Port of Felixstowe (the biggest container port in the country and is planned to grow substantially requiring good rail and road links);
 - (ii) Sizewell Power Station (with a current debate over expansion taking place at national level); and
 - (iii) Martlesham Heath, centred on BT's research and development headquarters, a key part of the information, communication and technology cluster for the East of England.
- 1.13 Tourism is also a major driver for the local economy and includes internationally recognized organisations like Aldeburgh Music.
- 1.14 The East of England is commonly assumed to be affluent yet parts, including areas of Suffolk Coastal, face problems associated with remote areas that have limited employment opportunities, low wages and lack access to services.
- 1.15 Gross total average earnings in the district (i.e. part time as well as full time workers) are below the regional average despite the presence of such major wealth generators as BT at Martlesham Heath.
- 1.16 Suffolk Coastal has the lowest proportion of students completing study at 19+ in Suffolk (81%). The rate for 16-18 year olds is the second lowest in Suffolk (75%) These achievement rates are below average for the county and region. A recent employer survey has identified the lack of skills, as well as a perception of a lack of motivation or "work ethos", in young people as a significant barrier to employment and to meeting business needs. Also, a large number of young people leave Suffolk Coastal at 18 resulting in an unbalanced age profile in the population with consequences for the economy and local communities. The district had the greatest net loss in Suffolk of 16-24 year olds due to migration in 2005. Young people (particularly in the rural parts of the District) are concerned about the accessibility of education training and social facilities.
- 1.17 Much of the district is within the Haven Gateway sub region, one of the fastest growing areas in the Eastern Region, with a population projected to increase from 611,300 in 2001 to 684,500 in 2021. The Haven Gateway sub region includes the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich together with growth nodes at Colchester and Ipswich. Regeneration needs and opportunities lie mainly in the towns and on the coast and estuaries. Improvements to transport, environmental and community infrastructure are required. Based on the Haven ports' role as generators of economic activity, the Haven Gateway Partnership provides a context in which partners from the private and public sectors can work together to promote economic opportunities and secure the future prosperity of the sub-region. The Partnership has published a 'Framework for Growth'.
- 1.18 The Haven Gateway sub-region was awarded New Growth Point status by the Government in 2006 in order to direct finances to help foster growth of the areas of Suffolk and Essex immediately around the ports of Felixstowe, Harwich, Ipswich and Mistley and includes the southern part of the district.
- 1.19 Key Economic Issues**
- (i) Lack of accessibility to jobs, both in terms of the quality of the transport system but also the number and location of the jobs themselves
 - (ii) Lack of diversity in terms of employment opportunities.
 - (iii) More recognition of the potential for investment in the economy, notably in high-tech activity
 - (iv) The pressure to develop existing employment sites for other uses, notably residential development

- (v) Tourism is good for the economy, but the environment and local communities are sensitive to visitor pressure.
- (vi) Young people leaving rural areas due to a lack of suitable jobs
- (vii) The economic impact of the decommissioning of Sizewell A
- (viii) The need for additional flexibility in respect of new policies to cover the conversion of rural buildings, particularly when close to sustainable communities
- (ix) A concern for the creation of lorry movements on rural roads by new employment activity but also by agricultural practice
- (x) The A12 north of Wickham Market needs to be upgraded due to the increased daily and holiday traffic
- (xi) Sustainable balance should not become subservient to economic prosperity

TRANSPORT PROFILE

- 1.20 Rail services exist which provide access to major centers outside the District such as Ipswich, Lowestoft, Norwich, Cambridge and Colchester. Such services also provide, at times, direct access to London for such communities as Felixstowe, Woodbridge and Saxmundham and a number of smaller settlements. Some funding of improvements to the rail freight network have been agreed as part of the re-configuration package recently agreed for the port of Felixstowe.
- 1.21 The only trunk road in the district is the A14 running between Felixstowe and Ipswich, this being dualled and giving access eventually to the national motorway network. Major freight route difficulties can be experienced if blockages occur east of or on the Orwell Bridge, as no suitable alternative route is available.
- 1.22 The A12 provides the main route north to south through the district, but is only dualled for a small part of its length. "B" class roads serve most of the higher order settlements. Elsewhere much of the road network is single-track roads with passing places.
- 1.23 Good bus routes operate within and between the larger settlements, particularly between Martlesham Heath and Ipswich. A number of local and longer distance cycle ways exist throughout the district. However, for many of the residents living in the rural parts of the district having access to a car is essential to the quality of life. Many do not have regular public transport links to market towns, for example.
- 1.24 Air quality is an issue at many locations along the road networks but only one 'Air Quality Management Zone' has been declared at the Lime Kiln Quay/Thoroughfare/St Johns Street cross roads in Woodbridge.
- 1.25 Responsibility for local transport lies with Suffolk County Council as the highway authority for Suffolk. The authority prepares transport strategy, primarily in the form of the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The District Council has very few powers or responsibilities in relation to the operation of either the road or rail network. It can, however, operate as a partner in the enhancement of the network and use its powers as a planning authority to enable investment to occur.
- 1.26 Key Transport Issues**
- (i) Lack of accessibility to jobs, both in terms of the quality of the transport system but also the number and location of the jobs themselves
 - (ii) A concern for the creation of lorry traffic on rural roads by new employment activity but also by agricultural practice
 - (iii) The A12 north of Wickham Market needs to be upgraded due to the increased daily and holiday traffic
 - (iv) The Orwell Bridge
 - (v) Lorry parking at Felixstowe

ENVIRONMENTAL PROFILE

- 1.27 The natural and built environment of Suffolk Coastal is special. Approximately a third of the District is designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 11,201.50 hectares of the District is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Suffolk's landscape contains diverse landscape, including much farmland, which supports a rich biodiversity. There are 33 Conservation Areas and approximately 2,700 buildings Listed of Architectural or Historic Importance in the District.

- 1.28 The exceptional quality of the natural and built environment makes Suffolk Coastal a very special place to live and work and a popular destination for visitors and tourists from the UK and abroad. This brings with it the responsibility of preserving this heritage as the utmost priority, for its own intrinsic value, as well as for the health, prosperity and well being of the residents. Standards of environmental stewardship need to be of the highest order.
- 1.29 With such a large body of scientific evidence now highlighting the serious and urgent nature of climate change the debate is now focused on what action needs to be taken. A Royal Commission on Environmental Protection considered that the UK would need to reduce CO2 emissions by 60% by about 2050 to avoid “dangerous climate change”. At a more local level the implications of climate change, should it continue unchecked, include increased coastal and flood plain flooding, permanent coastal land loss, higher incidents of damage to transport and communications infrastructure caused by extreme weather, and increased deaths and hospital admissions from heat related conditions.
- 1.30 The district carbon dioxide footprint is slightly better than average in the county (ranked 3rd best behind Ipswich & Waveney). However, the growth planned for the District presents opportunities as well as challenges for addressing environmental issues, particularly those related to wind energy and biomass. Sizewell Nuclear power stations are located in the district and government proposals on energy are likely to lead to proposals for further nuclear power.
- 1.31 The coastline is the subject of pressures from rising sea levels and also falling land levels together with the consequences of increased storminess. This also impacts on the major estuaries of the Blyth, Alde/Ore, Deben and Orwell that form a major part of the coastal area of the district and are intrinsic to its character. The coastal areas subject to pressures include the towns of Felixstowe, and Aldeburgh, large stretches of the AONB, and substantial designated sites of importance for nature conservation.
- 1.32 The coastal area must continue to support strong communities and a high quality natural environment. With particular regards to the impact of climate change/sea level rise on the coastline, integrated coastal zone management needs to address the needs of our communities and the natural environment.
- 1.33 The Shoreline Management Plan (in preparation) is a strategic document that proposes preferred short, medium and long-term options for the management of the open coast from the perspective of flood risk and erosion over a time period of 100 years. In addition, Suffolk Estuarine Strategies (in preparation) consist of estuary-wide strategies that propose preferred short, medium and long-term options for the management of flood risk on the estuaries over a time period of 100 years.
- 1.34 Key Environmental Issues**
- Maintaining high quality design.
 - Maintaining and enhancing the high quality built, natural and historic environments
 - Recycling waste.
 - Energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy
 - Conservation of water resources
 - The coastline is subject to pressures, both human and natural.
 - Flooding
 - Air quality
 - The value of the countryside to biodiversity and geodiversity

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL PROFILE

- 1.35 By 2021 the UK population is expected to increase to 67 million and the number of those aged over 85 will increase by 50% in the same period. Increased life expectancy will bring with it growing numbers of people with health and care needs and the changing demands of the older population will put pressure on the public and private sectors to adapt.
- 1.36 The District has a significantly older population than the national average (15.72% over 69 compared to 11.58% for Great Britain) and the second highest in Suffolk. We can expect this to result in increasing demands on health, social and community services including housing services and provision. Older people have a wide range of needs and aspirations depending on their circumstances. Many are very active and want facilities and opportunities the same as other members of the community.

- 1.37 A large number of young people leave Suffolk Coastal at 18 resulting in an unbalanced age profile in the population with consequences for the economy and local communities. The district had the greatest net loss in Suffolk of 16-24 year olds due to migration in 2005. Young people (particularly in the rural parts of the District) are concerned about the accessibility of education training and social facilities.
- 1.38 The East of England is commonly assumed to be affluent yet parts, including areas of Suffolk Coastal, face problems associated with remote areas that have limited employment opportunities, low wages and lack access to services.
- 1.39 In Felixstowe the south and west wards have significant levels of multiple deprivation, while part of western Saxmundham is also assessed as more deprived than the national average. One small part of Leiston is ranked amongst the most deprived 10% in the region, with 62% of residents having no qualifications and 70% living in social, rented housing.
- 1.40 The rural parts of the District have poor access to services when measured against national standards and the trend is for rural services to continue to contract. Suffolk Coastal are ranked 5th poorest out of the 7 districts in Suffolk for overall access to services. The district is also below the median (of districts in Britain) for access to a bank or building society, and in the bottom quartile for access to a secondary school, doctor's surgery, post office or primary school.
- 1.41 Sexual Health, obesity and alcohol abuse are all issues for the district. For example, in 2006, 31.5% of Year 6 children weighed and measured in Suffolk Coastal were overweight or obese (32.6% for Suffolk as a whole). Suffolk Coastal has a worse than average rate of alcohol specific hospital admissions for under 18s compared to England as a whole (2004/05). There is a lack of evidence on substance misuse throughout the county.
- 1.42 Although there has been a 42% fall in crime since 1995, public concern about crime remains high across the country. The perception of anti-social behaviour from young people is of concern to many residents' especially older people (Suffolk Coastal residents perceive parents not taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children (43%) and teenagers hanging round the streets (39%) as the two biggest problems in their area).
- 1.43 The focus of effort from all sectors should be to improve quality of life – especially for vulnerable people, including the growing population of older people, who should be supported to live in their own homes and communities if they should wish. It is also important to foster communications between generations so to reduce stereotypical fear and misunderstanding.
- 1.44 Key Issues of Community Well-being:**
- Fear of crime
 - Given the age structure of the population, more specific provision should be made for older people.
 - Lack of facilities for young people.
 - Pressure on services caused by an ageing population
 - Loss and lack of local facilities and services.
 - Sufficient infrastructure to support the growth proposed

THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 1.45 In light of the available evidence and evaluation of the challenges and opportunities that face the district, the Local Strategic Partnership has identified ten key issues for Suffolk Coastal District that need to be addresses by 2021. Crucially, it has identified six of these issues as priorities, to help direct the work of the Partnership into areas where it can uniquely make a difference.

The six priorities are:

- 1. Access to Services**
- 2. Strong, Supportive Communities**
- 3. Climate Change and the Environment**
- 4. Economy and Skills**
- 5. Healthier Lives for All**
- 6. Young People**

1.46 The Partnership considers the following four issues to also be important but recognises that other partnerships are already focusing on them and does not aim to duplicate their work.

1. **Community Safety**
2. **Coastal and Estuary Management**
3. **Housing**
4. **Support for vulnerable people to live independent lives in their community**

The Local Development Framework is acknowledged as a key tool for implementing this Strategy.