

3. Guiding Principles

3.1 DEVELOPING AN OVERARCHING VISION

A vision for the Peninsula

Currently no single, agreed vision has been articulated for the future of the Felixstowe Peninsula or the seafront and the town centre.

Recent changes in the master plan area have occurred in the absence of any overarching vision. The most significant decisions have been based on the allocations and policies within the statutory Local Plan. These decisions simply reflect central and local Government planning policy rather than offering any inspirational vision for the area.

SCDC's Local Development Framework – Core Strategy

A draft vision for the Peninsula was included as part of Suffolk Coastal's Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation Paper, itself forming part of the emerging Local Development Framework. This vision was the subject of public consultation in spring 2007. Of the eleven points, the following are the most relevant to the seafront and town centre.

"The Vision for the Felixstowe and Trimleys Peninsula in 2021 is for an integrated area that:

- *Has embraced the opportunities for regeneration, growth and change...;*
- *Has maintained and protected the high quality and variety of the built environments;*
- *Has provided additional housing to accommodate the existing and some new population, by making maximum use of brownfield opportunities...;*
- *...provide an extended comprehensive range and scale of facilities...*
- *Has developed its tourism role in terms of services, facilities, and accommodation, which builds on the qualities and facilities offered by the*

town... creating strong links between the seafront and town centre and the qualities of the surrounding natural environment;

- *Has expanded the retail, service and other facilities available...;*
- *Is well defended from risk of flooding and coastal erosion."*

Felixstowe and Trimleys Peninsula Future Steering Group's Objectives

A workshop session of the Felixstowe and Trimleys Peninsula Future Steering group was held on 8 December 2006 at which the vision was considered and a range of projects discussed. This led the Steering Group to devise a set of objectives based on this overarching vision for the Felixstowe and Trimleys Peninsula.

The twelve objectives are visionary in their own right and begin to explore how the vision might be realised.

To aid our understanding, David Lock Associates has summarised these objectives within four distinct aims:

- 1** ***'Greater social inclusion across age groups and areas of the town'***
- 2** ***'Improving the tourist offer'***
- 3** ***'Broadening the range of jobs and opportunities'***
- 4** ***'Improvements to physical infrastructure'***

To aid discussion, the objectives are explored in more detail below.

1 *'Greater social inclusion across age groups and areas of the town'*

- *Enhances social and community cohesion, particularly in respect of the diversity in age ranges.*
- *Secure investment to regenerate poor quality parts of South and west Felixstowe (not least the Sea Road/Langer Road area).*

- *Secure the social and community infrastructure to support the evolving needs of the Felixstowe and Trimley communities, including improved access to green space.*

2 'Improving the tourist offer'

- *Re-invigorate the resort so as to be attractive to visitors all the year round, building on the natural attributes of the area*
- *Develop the combined attraction of the town centre and resort to visitors to benefit the economy of the town and improve the services available to residents and visitors.*
- *Identify and promote iconic identity for Felixstowe that will facilitate its recognition and thereby its regeneration.*

3 'Broadening the range of jobs and opportunities'

- *Diversify the employment base to reduce the reliance on the Port and associated industries.*
- *Secure the provision of a range of employment land and premises to meet the needs of the developing economy.*
- *Achieve a greater synergy between the Port and the Town/Parishes to the mutual benefit of those employed and those resident in the area, not least better access to services and jobs.*
- *Extend/improve/broaden the education/skills provision, including higher education provision, building on the strengths of the area, to meet the needs of the workforce and employers.*

4 'Improvements to physical infrastructure'

- *Achieve improved transport infrastructure within and serving the area.*
- *Secure appropriate investment in coast protection.*

In broad terms, the emerging Core Strategy Vision and Felixstowe & Trimleys Peninsula Future Group's objectives are robust and have shaped the range of

ideas which form the long list. David Lock Associates will explore the role of tourism in the town in greater detail.

The Role of Tourism

Reinvigorating tourism and the renaissance of the resort is a central pillar of both the emerging Core Strategy Vision and Felixstowe & Trimleys Peninsula Future Group's Objectives.

David Lock Associates believes that although tourism will remain important to the town and there is much to be done to improve the current offer, **tourism will not regain the strength to lead the regeneration of the town.** At present there is only a small and fickle market for long stay seaside holidays in the UK, which puts back the emphasis on the town's potential for growth as a day attraction for a regional catchment market, and specialist holidays.

Given the declining state of domestic tourism there is greater merit in placing emphasis on **widening the town's offer for its existing and future population** to:

- enhance the quality of life of the town's **existing population** and;
- retain (and expand) the **population of families and young people.**

The benefits from this are:

- the creation of a more balanced population;
- a population that will sustain the town for 365 days a year rather than the seasonal offer that tourism brings; and in turn
- ,widening the town's offer of facilities and amenities as well as environmental improvements will increase the number of day and short trips to the town by visitors.

The aim must be to produce effective regeneration for living communities.

Places where people want to live and work are more likely to be places that people want to visit.

Marketing the Town

A number of UK coastal towns have adopted a brand or theme to create a future vision for their towns to aid the marketing of the town primarily for tourism.

Given that we believe the focus of attention should be on seeking a balanced demographic, we do not believe that Felixstowe's future success lies in aligning itself as the nation's capital of a distinct theme.

The success of other coastal towns has stemmed from **outsiders seeking to sample the life of a resident**. Discerning visitors (with a high spend) are attracted by the towns' high quality built form, retail offer, good beaches, range of restaurants and cafés and rich cultural life.

Felixstowe benefits from unique circumstances:

1 *Unique Climate & Location*

Felixstowe was *the* original high quality seaside town and resort, not only in Suffolk but the on the East Coast, indeed of national regard. It achieved this successful status through its high quality architecture and townscape in an enviable coastal location, at the head of two rivers (Deben & Orwell), which in turn generates a unique climate permitting record hours of sunshine and minimal rainfall and cloud cover.

2 *Heritage*

Felixstowe is the largest town in the District and also has the greatest concentration of Victorian and Edwardian vernacular townscape. This encompasses the heart of Felixstowe – the master plan study area. This townscape character appears to be cherished locally but underplayed as a leisure attraction in its own right.

3 *Accessibility*

Despite its Peninsula location Felixstowe is better connected than other East Coast seaside towns thanks to the A14, the rail line and its proximity to local centres of population – Ipswich, Colchester and beyond even to London, East Anglia and the Midlands.

Felixstowe must recapture its pride, its passion and hold out for high quality. If it does this the already popular town centre can be protected and enhanced and the seafront can be rejuvenated. If the town can improve for the benefit of its residents, then visitors will come too.

Resort Image

The current identity of Felixstowe is dominated by a “traditional British Resort” image. The value that this ‘tradition’ provides Felixstowe is limited, indeed it might undermine the town's image. It offers:

- little for resident citizens;
- is entirely seasonal and;
- attracts a low spend and low investment.

Felixstowe needs to move beyond its sentimental attachment to the “traditional British Resort” image. The arcade element is a production of the second half of the twentieth century. It is a small slice in Felixstowe history, but with a lasting impression.

The twentieth century boom in holidays saw the working classes flock to coastal towns. Towns responded by providing cheap and popular entertainment. As society has attained a greater expendable income and international flights have become cheaper, these holidaymakers have flown to Spain where hotels are cheap, food and drink are cheap and the sun always shines. This has left many coastal towns across the country with down-at-heel arcades and amusements parks.

Meanwhile, the discerning tourist with the greatest spend will always find the most interesting and attractive places to spend time, whether at home or abroad. They are attracted by the quality of the whole experience.

A Vision for Felixstowe

The Steering Group adopted the following vision for the future of Felixstowe:

“A thriving seaside town and port, attractive to residents of all ages, and welcoming to visitors who wish to experience the town’s beautiful coastal location, proud Edwardian heritage, vibrant and diverse retail offer, café culture and healthy outdoor lifestyle.”

3.2 INITIAL IDEAS FOR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Who are we aiming at?

Over the period 1991-2001:

- the population grew by 6.6%;
 - but there was a reduction by 5.7% of 18-29 year olds and;
 - a growth by 7.4% of people aged 45-64.
- 60-plus year olds make up approximately 28% of the town's population.

Felixstowe's population is getting older. Older people are moving in, younger people are moving away and birth rates are falling. Felixstowe, like many seaside resorts, is not retaining or attracting a balanced community. This has significant, negative, long term implications for the town.

In the Local Strategy document in 2005, David Lock Associates made clear its view that although tourism will remain important to the town, it is unlikely to regain the strength to lead the regeneration of the town.

Given the declining state of domestic tourism there might be greater merit in concentrating on the quality of life of the citizens of the town and the range of services and facilities available to them. If successfully done, this itself will create a place more attractive to visitors.

Coastal Erosion

A recurring theme heard by the David Lock Associates team at the 'one to one' stakeholder events held on 25 May 2007 was the need for protection of the beach and maintenance of the coastal defences.

Recent weather events have highlighted the current fragility of the coastal defences which help retain the beach and protect this part of the coastline. It is clear that a guiding principle must be the protection of the town's key assets – the beach and its defences.

SCDC has advised that the Environment Agency has allocated funds for this work and a meeting is due in January 2008 to confirm the availability of funding. Initial indications are that the bid for funds will be successful, and work could commence early in 2008, subject to approval by the Environment Agency's National Review Group

Protection of the Town Centre

SCDC's Health Check of the town centre indicated that it is a "vital and viable" centre. The Health check identified that the town had:

- an above average comparison provision (goods that are not considered a necessity);
- limited "key attractions", but a high percentage of multiple retailers;
- good choice of convenience (goods that are classed as a necessity);
- a vacancy rate consistent with the UK average;
- scope to increase retail unit size (presumably through the amalgamation of existing units);
- potential to improve the pedestrian environment and environmental quality;
- little capacity was identified for additional convenience shopping space;
- but potential for additional comparison space was identified.

We would add that the town clearly has a good selection of independent retailers within fine Edwardian shop units.

Widening the range of land uses on Hamilton Road

Back in 2002 planning permission was refused for a coffee shop on Hamilton Road. The application was considered contrary to policy AP179 of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan which identifies Hamilton Road (between Orwell Road and Cobbold Road) as a Prime Shopping Area where "change of use of shops to non-shopping uses will not be permitted".

Though the objective of the policy is understood, it is proposed that the emerging Local Development Framework review the blanket application of this policy.

Recent revisions to the use class order have now created new classes which allows for a wider range of uses to be identified as appropriate whilst retaining control over other uses. These new classes separate food and drink into:

- Restaurants and cafés (where consumption occurs on the premises – use class A3);
- Hot food takeaways (use class A5) and;
- Drinking establishments (pubs and wine bars – use class A4).

The Role of Art

Art has great potential to be an integral part of the regeneration of the town. SCDC has a number of interesting ideas which promote a creative approach to regeneration and the opportunity to enhance the cultural offer of the town.

The arts have a vital role to play in ensuring regeneration schemes succeed. This includes both the form and purpose of the built environment. Artists should be engaged to help create the environment.

As individual projects for regeneration move forward, a role for artist within each design team should be considered. They can be used engage with the local community and respond to the character of an area.

Art can be used to create attractive and unique coastal attractions. For example bespoke and appropriate street furniture such as Blackpool's award winning whale tail sculpture that is a shelter and seating or Anthony Gormley's statues at Gormley, which raise the profile of a place and act as attractions for visitors. The town would benefit from a community arts facility.

Extending the day

The town centre and the seafront are the focus for activity between 9am and 5.30pm. Beyond these hours, Felixstowe's offer is limited. Notable exceptions are the:

- Odeon cinema on the Triangle
- Spa Pavilion
- Felixstowe Leisure Centre
- Pubs on the seafront

- Arcades

Extending the towns offer, and lengthening the day, could have significant social and economic impacts.

Widening the leisure offer

The importance of the provision of sport and recreation cannot be underestimated. As a nation, our increasingly sedentary working and social lives has led to pressure for us all to adopt healthier and more active lives. Healthier lifestyles can have far reaching, and well documented, positive socio-economic impacts. Health can raise an individuals sense of well being as well as encouraging social contact and cohesion. Subsequent knock on effects for health and social services and the UK economy are clear.

We are aware that there is a demand for further sport and recreation provision by existing residents, both old and young, which could also provide a valuable tourist resource.

Of particular interest is the town's relationship to the sea. The Felixstowe Youth Forum advised that there was very little opportunity to enjoy any form of watersports, despite there being:

- two recognised beaches suitable for wind surfing and sailing;
- close proximity of Felixstowe Ferry sailing club; and
- Port of Felixstowe sponsored international regatta.

We consider there to be a significant untapped potential.

Sea Road Frontage

Felixstowe benefits from a long seafront stretching from Languard Fort to Felixstowe Ferry. The seafront comprises a wide range of uses and attractions at various points (or nodes) along its length. However the length is a weakness to the viability of the uses.

The attractions are spread far apart. Some remain strong but some are failing. Under-investment is most evident along the Sea Road frontage extending from Undercliff Road West to Orford Road. Amongst empty buildings lie amusement parks, bed and breakfast accommodation and a limited food and drink offer.

The central focus for high level attractions should be Hamilton Road and Undercliff Road and efforts and intervention should focus on this area.

Deliverable Opportunities: Land Ownership

The long list of ideas and opportunities are located on both publicly owned and privately owned land. No discussion has been entered into with regard to land ownership. Further investigations will be required to determine the land ownership and discussions with private land owner will be needed. These discussions are likely to be long and complex.

Local Partnership with Employers

Partnerships with local employers should be sought to aid the delivery of the short listed schemes.

Milton Keynes Theatre, a council-led initiative, was part funded by donations by local employers. On a much larger scale, Maersk funded the development of Copenhagen's Opera House.

The region has two notable employers each of which is committed to their local communities:

- British Telecom plc
- The Port of Felixstowe

Timescales

The long list of ideas is presented in three groups:

- Short term projects that require minimal investment and could be implemented within 12 months;
- Medium term projects that require further research or design work and can be implemented within 2 to 5 years and;
- Long term projects requiring major investment.

Ownership of ideas

This will be a key element in passing ownership of the ideas and opportunities to both residential and commercial communities.

Establishing a sense of local ownership and responsibility will strengthen the likelihood of action being taken and put pressure on those that control land upon which ideas are based.

There is a significant opportunity to engage with a wide range of ages. DLA's discussion with the Felixstowe Youth Forum yielded an invaluable insight into their inspirations and aspirations.