

Summary of Discussions

North Berwick Coastal Area Partnership meeting 24th June 2014

Some key themes emerging from the discussions:

(in no particular order)

1. Poverty and inequality

While acknowledging the relative affluence of the ward as a whole, the discussions highlighted the need to recognise that there were examples of real deprivation and poverty across the area (eg 1 in 5 children living in poverty in parts of North Berwick, ¼ of private households in the rural East of the county living in fuel poverty). Recognising that these are actual issues in the ward, rather than simply cases of relative deprivation in comparison to those around them, is key to ensuring that crisis and support services are available locally for those in need.

2. Access to affordable housing

There is high demand on the proportionally low number of social houses available in the ward leading to an increased reliance on the private rental sector where, local intelligence suggests, rents are very high and that it can be difficult to sustain long term tenancies due to pressure from the holiday rental market. There was agreement that there is a need for more social and affordable housing in the area – and that this needs to be in areas with good access to transport and services. However the building of new housing (affordable or commercially driven) will have an impact on infrastructure and services, as demonstrated already by pressure on school places and buildings in some villages. How can the demand for more housing be balanced with pressures on services and the desire to maintain the character of the town and villages in the area? What can be done to ensure existing housing stock (social, owner occupied and rented) remains accessible to local families?

3. Access Deprivation

While public transport from North Berwick to Edinburgh was considered to have improved over recent years there were still issues relating to cost, reliability, timetabling and flexibility that were highlighted in discussions – leading to calls for an affordable, integrated public transport service across the area (incorporating bus/train/bike/walking strategies).

The discussions also emphasised the difficulties in using public transport to travel outside the North Berwick - Edinburgh corridor - eg to Haddington or Dunbar. Remembering that 4 datazones in the ward - covering Whitekirk, Lochhouses, Ballencrieff, Kingston, East Fortune, Fenton Barns, Dirleton and parts of Aberlady- are among the 20% most access deprived datazones in Scotland, and recognising the difficulties of providing a commercially viable service in these areas, the discussions emphasised the need for a serious response from ELC to developing an effective community transport strategy.

4. Localising Services

Across all the topics there was a general feeling that there was a need to reverse the current trend of centralise services and move services closer to the people they are designed to benefit – particularly in relation to health and mental health services. Highlighting that

approximately 1/3 of the ward's population live in rural areas or villages within some of the most access deprived parts of East Lothian the discussions also emphasised the difficulties in accessing centralised service (especially in Haddington) if you do not have private transport.

5. Sustainable Economy

Discussions relating to a sustainable economy in the area ranged widely and highlighted some specific different issues in North Berwick (e.g. the role of the Business Association, the desire for more tourist information, and potential for a Town Centre Plan) and the surrounding villages (where sustaining local shops and facilities were key issues). One common issue across all areas however was the goal to improve the potential for local employment and reduce the need to commute outside the area –through increasing the space allocated to business/office space in Local Development Plan, improving access to flexible, serviced office space and improving the speed and reliability of broadband.

6. Increasing Older Population

The proportionally high percentage of older people in the area, and the growing numbers of older people aged over 85, present challenges and opportunities for both service providers and communities themselves. It was identified that there was a need to map service provision for older people, test where there were pressures (existing and expected) and explore opportunities for social enterprises in the social care field, opportunities which could also support local employment. Opportunities to develop community strategies to help older people remain / become active and included within the community – eg Dementia Friendly initiatives were also highlighted, as was the benefits of having high numbers of retirees in the area (both over 65 and under 65) providing a pool of people who may be able to take up expanded volunteering roles.

7. Greenspace and the Environment

Access to open / green spaces and the high quality of the natural (and built) environment in the area is a key reason that people choose to live in this ward – and recent local campaigns (eg at Coos Green) have demonstrated an increased public awareness and valuing of this. Protecting, maintaining and enhancing this needs to be balanced with pressures for increased housing and infrastructure developments – both in relation to new greenfield sites and infill building.

8. Community Safety

Despite police and ELC figures showing that the ward is one of the safest places to live in East Lothian, with proportionally low rates of crime and disturbance, there is still a need to reduce people's perception that it is not a safe place. The question was raised that since there is much more public awareness and local reporting of crime rates and initiatives (through CAPP and police reports at community meetings) does this make for safer or more worried communities? Is more community intervention eg Neighbourhood watch schemes the answer or would promoting the good news stories further have more impact?