

Preston Seton Gosford Area Partnership

Key themes emerging from the Partnership discussions

The themes listed below (in no particular order) have been collated from the recent discussions at Partnership meetings and may provide a framework for beginning to identify what can be done differently in the area to make a difference towards achieving the goals of:

- i. Reducing inequalities
- ii. Developing a sustainable local economy
- iii. Supporting resilient people
- iv. Having safe and vibrant communities

1) Local Employment

There was considerable emphasis throughout the discussions to improve local employment opportunities and the need to focus on employability, getting people onto the job ladder through appropriate skills development and training. One option highlighted was the need to attract larger employers to the area (with key opportunities highlighted in the hospitality and care sectors). It was felt that not only would this both reduce the need to travel for work but could also improve progression routes for residents into more skilled/professional employment, both factors which could assist the local economy overall by reducing 'spending leak' to other areas and over time increasing the disposable income of residents. The importance of reliable broadband for business use and home-working was also highlighted.

2) Prestonpans Town Centre

It was acknowledged by all that Prestonpans Town Centre was struggling and seemed to be continuing to decline. Unlike other wards in the East Lothian the physical shape of the area meant that this town centre did not really function as a centre for the villages (or the town itself) and, aside from the supermarket provision, held little draw as a commercial, retail or service centre. The consensus was that there was a need to re-imagine the role of this town centre in order to deliver a regeneration plan based on its unique assets.

3) Local Environment and Development

Preston Seton Gosford is almost a mini East Lothian – heavily urbanised at one end with a coastal frontage, industrial pockets and an expanse of agricultural areas inland – and it was highlighted by participants that it is the coastal aspect of the area that has drawn many residents to its town and villages. This area also however faces the same pressures as exist across East Lothian for more housing and employment. While recognising that this is a very controversial, and potentially divisive, topic at present (with the future of the power station site under debate and the Main issues Report that will shape East Lothian's Local Development Plan about to be released) it was also clear from the discussions the importance people placed on ensuring that the community is able to participate in negotiating a balance between the impacts, opportunities and benefits that may arise from any development in the area.

4) Services for Children and Young People

Throughout the discussions there was a clear awareness that budget constraints are already having an impact on the non-statutory learning and development opportunities for children and young people (eg youthclubs, crèches, holiday clubs, wrap-around care, sports/music activities etc) that are being provided in the area. In some cases this has resulted in reduced operating hours / weeks of the year, limitations on numbers of places or increased costs. A number of priorities for provision emerged including:

- investment in work with children in their early years (both to support families to provide positive home environments and more directly to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop the core skills they need to flourish once they reach school age)
- providing access to affordable, high-quality childcare (from crèche provision to holiday and after-school clubs) to enable parents to undertake training and pursue sustainable employment

9/10/14

- working with local providers to ensure access to opportunities for young people are more equitably available to all young people in the area and also able to benefit those most in need.

5) Personal Resilience

A key theme that emerged from the discussions was the need to support initiatives that promoted personal development, learning, positive mental health and social connectedness for adults across the community (particularly the young unemployed, the under-employed and older adults living alone). Central to these discussions was the importance of people developing personal resilience – ie the ability to confidently respond to change and crisis in their lives in constructive ways. It was also recognised however that, while this was an important long term goal, this needed to be balanced by the availability of services able to intervene / offer support as required.

6) Access to Health Services

Access to health services in the area was another key focus on discussion, particularly the sense that the existing doctor's surgeries are oversubscribed, resulting in it becoming increasingly difficult for residents to get timely appointments. There was also discussion of the need to maintain / re-provide mental health and preventative services in the area.

7) Community Involvement and Cohesion

Participants acknowledged the high levels of community spirit and involvement in the area – emphasising the range of active local groups and events contributing to this including the 3 Harbours Festival, the Goth, In-Bloom Groups, Battlefield trust, Galas etc. There was also a general feeling that newer residents to the area were becoming increasingly involved in these activities, promoting community cohesion. There was however the sense that more could be done to ensure the whole community was able to engage with these groups and events and that more effort could be made to target involvement from potentially isolated new residents and older members of the population.

8) Local Housing Need

The emphasis placed on community cohesion and sense of place throughout the discussions also led to an emphasis on making sure people have access to secure, stable and affordable housing across the area. Given the changing demographic in the area - a growing older population, more adults of all ages living alone, economic pressures resulting in more inter-generational households - the discussions also highlighted the need to make sure that there were appropriate housing options available locally to enable people to stay in their communities if their housing needs changed – eg downsizing from a family home to a retirement home.

9) Increasing Attendance and Preventing Anti-Social Behaviour

Members of the PSG Community and Police Partnership (CAPP) raised concerns of increased anti-social behaviour among students of the local high school and dis-engagement with education. They attribute this rise to reduced community policing, structural changes within the children's panels, the removal of attendance officers and limited support from social work or council. Numerous factors have been identified that are believed to be creating a knock-on-effect on school attendance rates. Engagement with youths, linking key personnel together, multi-agency training and an open and proactive mindset will be integral to forming solutions.

10) Challenges to living a healthy lifestyle

The lack of safe cycle and walking paths has been acknowledged as a key problem area, as well as difficulties for the local community in accessing healthy living services and sporting facilities. There were also calls to improve accessibility to healthy affordable food and improve opportunities for causal engagement with sport / fitness activities.