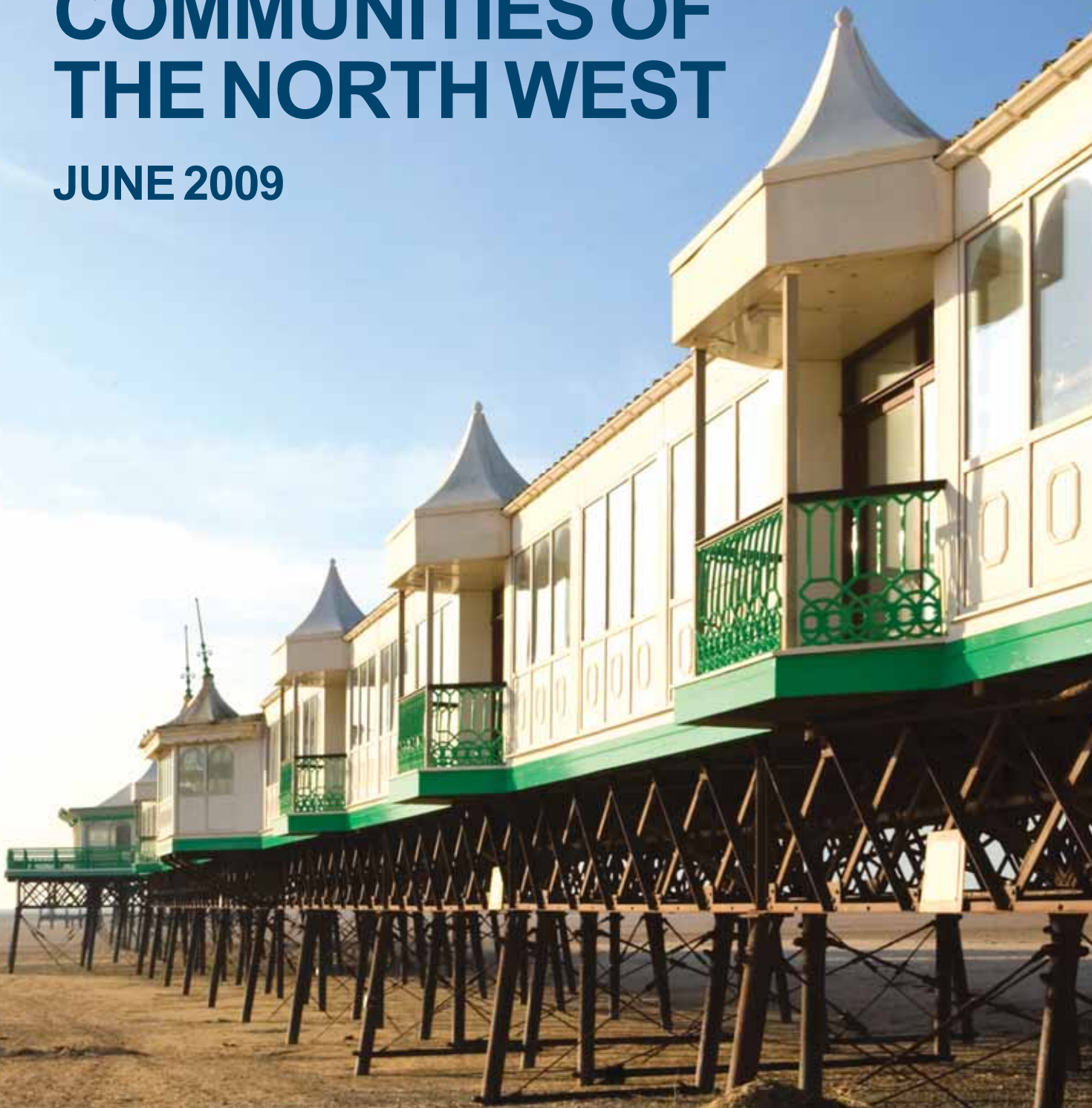


UNDERSTANDING THE COASTAL COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTH WEST

JUNE 2009



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The well-being of coastal communities is one of the key objectives of the North West Coastal Forum¹ who have commissioned this work with 4NW - the Regional Leaders Board, supported by funding from 4NW and Defra.

This report has been produced to help those interested in and responsible for the sustainable future of our coastal communities to understand their characteristics, the issues that affect them and the opportunities they offer the region. It does not provide recommendations for policy and action but does highlight some of the issues policy makers might like to consider when drawing up policy that affects our coastal communities.

This study is different from recent work² on the coast in that its approach has been to work at the level of individual communities and settlements rather than whole districts. Districts can fit the larger coastal towns, but frequently stretch some way 'inland' and so do not allow potential differences between smaller coastal communities to emerge. Our approach³ enables a more detailed analysis of the North West's coastal communities.

The study looked at 47 coastal communities⁴, from the entire length of the region's coast, ranging in size from the major conurbation of Liverpool (705,000 population), through towns of different sizes, to villages with fewer than 500 population (such as Ravenglass). These were examined through 21 datasets organised into three sections:

'People' - data relating to residents

'Work' - local economy and employment

'Place' - characteristics of the settlement

This analysis is presented within the report in four sub-regional sections. The underlying data and a collection of GIS maps are provided in separate documents available from the North West Coastal Forum Secretariat.

National Context

There is a long history of publicly funded intervention and investment in coastal communities, the most recent national programme being the "Sea Change" fund.

Coastal communities have steadily become more prominent in public policy analysis and comment over the last few years. Recent studies have reinforced the view that coastal communities face significant social and economic challenges.

In 2007 the Communities and Local Government Select Committee investigated 'Coastal Towns'. This was followed in 2008 by the Government Working Group on Coastal Towns who published a Benchmarking Study for England's 37 largest 'Seaside Towns' (including, Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport). These two studies found considerable variation in coastal areas but also important commonalities including:

- Peripheral locations which are exacerbated by weak transport links
- The impact on their economy of changing tourism trends
- High levels of seasonal unemployment
- A relatively large number of old and young people
- A high incidence of private rented houses and property in poor condition, both associated with the legacy of traditional seaside tourism and guesthouses
- A relatively high proportion of low income households
- Relatively low levels of educational attainment, lower life expectancy and higher rates of homelessness acceptances.

¹ The North West Coastal Forum is a not-for-profit multi-sector partnership which aims to promote and deliver integrated coastal zone management for the long-term sustainability of the region's coast. The North West Coastal Forum has recently produced the North West's first Regional Coastal Strategy (consultation draft). www.nwcoastalforum.co.uk

² England's Seaside Towns, A Benchmarking Study, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007; Framework for Action for the Coastal South East, SQW Ltd, 2008; East of England Coastal Initiative - Socio-Economic Research, Globe Regeneration Ltd, 2008

³ Each settlement was 'built' from Census Output Areas, Lower Super Output Areas or Postcode Sectors, depending on the data set in use.

⁴ This is most of the region's coastal communities, but not all of them, as not all can be satisfactorily represented in data.

⁵ Northwest Visitor Segmentation Research, Locum Consulting, 2006

^{6A} Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and SSSIs

What is the Picture in the North West?

The 47 coastal communities studied account for nearly one third of the region's population - around two million people. They host one in four of the region's jobs and include regional and sub-regional centres such as Liverpool, Southport, Blackpool, Morecambe and Barrow-in-Furness.

The coastal communities host ten working ports. These provide substantial economic connections, particularly to Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the Isle of Man. Planned investment in this port infrastructure, such as the development of the Liverpool Super Port and improved connections to Manchester via the Ship Canal, will be a major driver for sustainable economic growth. The region's ports significantly increase the opportunity for sustainable transport of bulk goods, raw materials and finished products in and out of the region and provide the necessary infrastructure to support offshore renewable energy generation.

The coast is a major asset for the region's visitor economy. In 2007 Blackpool Pleasure Beach attracted 5.5 million visitors whilst Morecambe and Southport each attracted in the region of 2.5 million visitors. All of the relevant sub-regional Tourist Boards and other appropriate organisations have implemented some form of coastal tourism branding. Visitor segmentation research commissioned by the NWDA in 2006⁵ found that the seaside still retains a strong allure for visitors.

The region's coast includes nationally and internationally important heritage, landscape and environmental sites. It contains a disproportionately high area of England's designated coastal habitat^{6A} and also hosts many of the region's important landscape and historic designations.

When considered collectively, the North West's coastal communities share some of the socio-economic characteristics of 'Seaside Towns' identified in the national studies:

- their demographic profile is older than the regional average
- deprivation (IMD) is higher in the coastal communities
- incomes are lower and the proportion of benefits claimants higher
- there is a higher incidence of lone parent and multi occupancy households.

However coastal communities in the North West:

- are losing rather than gaining population
- have high levels of social rented housing stock
- overall employment is higher in public administration than the retail and hospitality (tourism) sectors

Analysis of the coastal communities as a collective was useful to compare the position in the region with that identified at national level, but more detailed analysis has been required in order to understand coastal distinctiveness and individual communities. This work has highlighted key differences in the communities up and down the coast. Many of the region's coastal communities are very different from 'Seaside Towns' which have been the focus of national research.

The importance of this difference is a key finding of the study. There is a pressing need for the region to make a strong case to national policy makers and interest groups that a focus on 'Seaside Towns' alone will not be sufficient for the North West.

The study seeks to embrace and make sense of this more detailed picture through analysis. It considers the significance of the coast to its communities, and then proposes a typology for coastal communities to assist future policy development and any subsequent intervention.

A Typology of the Coastal Communities

'The Coast - so what?' discussion in the final report strongly emphasises the need for careful and detailed thinking on the potential that the coast offers the successful sustainable future of its communities and the region. Issues associated with rising sea levels, storm surges, increased risk from riverine and coastal flooding and erosion and the overwhelming imperative of achieving an 80% cut in CO2 emissions by 2050 will need to be factored in.

The work has shown that the region's coastal communities vary considerably and cannot be characterised simply as 'Seaside Towns'. In order to address these differences the report introduces a four-way typology. This will help understanding of the towns and so support subsequent policy and investment responses. The typology breaks the 47 communities into:

Larger Urban Areas

Maritime Towns

Working Towns by the Sea

Settlements of Choice

Larger Urban Areas

These are regional and sub-regional centres and post-industrial towns. They share negative socio-economic characteristics. The influence of the coast is important for these places, but they are also influenced by issues characteristic of post-industrial conurbations and their regeneration.

Large Urban Areas are found only in Merseyside where they form the core of the Liverpool City region. The maritime character of these settlements is hugely important but will not be the only thing that defines their future. The principal issue for these communities is to ensure that the overall regeneration effort takes full account of their coastal assets. It is a critical point of distinctiveness which offers business opportunities, connectivity, environmental and quality of life benefits.

Maritime Towns

These are the places where the coastal influence is most powerful. This descriptor covers a much broader range of places than the national focus on 'Seaside Towns' has so far allowed and includes small settlements. Maritime Towns have at some point been defined by a functional/economic relationship with the sea. Their future will be heavily influenced by the coastal features which have and continue to attract people and businesses to them. They can be resorts or ports, and are frequently both.

Maritime Towns are spread throughout the region. Policy relating to Maritime Towns in the North West will need to be alive to their differences. It must consider their coastal location as a core issue, and understand the challenges and opportunities that it provides.

Working Towns by the Sea

These are places which cannot be described as seaside resorts or retirement communities. They no longer have a dominant economic link with the coast and lack the type of infrastructure which typifies coastal settlements - harbours, promenades and beaches. These communities share socio-economic characteristics with inland settlements, yet proximity to the sea still makes up an important element of their character.

Future policy affecting Working Towns by the Sea should seek to ensure that the benefits offered by their particular types of coastal location are not overlooked, but will not place their coastal location centrally in their futures.

Settlements of Choice

These are popular communities made even more attractive by the high quality environment of their coastal location. They have a strong link to the sea and have often developed around their role as a harbour or haven. This sort of settlement is unlikely to be high on the agenda of sub-regional or regional policy makers; they are neither large enough nor challenged enough to attract attention.

Their coastal location is a very real asset yet it risks prejudicing their future as sustainable communities - both in terms of low carbon living and the balance and vibrancy of their population and business stock. These communities tend not to have structural social economic problems requiring intervention. Instead they need gentle but positive management to ensure they remain relatively balanced communities able to meet the obligations of sustainable living.

Learning and Emerging Priorities

This report offers a deep and place-specific understanding of the region's coastal communities. The North West Coastal Forum will now build on this work in their engagement with stakeholders, at national level and within the region. Critically the report will add to the evidence available to support the emerging Regional Strategy (RS2010).

The report's findings show that the Maritime Towns group are likely to benefit most from publicly funded intervention in the short term. Indeed some, but not all, of these communities are already the focus of investment strategies. Settlements in the Large Urban Areas group are also receiving considerable attention.

There is also a need to consider the implications of the coastal context of Working Towns by the Sea across a range of policy including planning, regeneration and housing. What might the coastal nuance mean for policy and action in these places when compared to similar sized settlements inland?

The Settlements of Choice group face issues common with many smaller, rural settlements. These can be collated under the heading of 'sustainable communities', and cover social mix, imbalance in local housing markets, commuting, and adequacy of local services. The need to tackle these issues is hastened by low-carbon imperatives.

In addition to these individual pieces of the picture is the need to consider the coast as a whole. How best to make use of the inherent connections and linkage between coastal communities is a difficult, but important issue. The existing light railway and tram infrastructure is hugely valuable in this respect, and will be increasingly so in the future. The typology of coastal communities is not geographically distinct. In many areas places of each type are intermingled and adjacent functioning as part of a wider spatial system. Going forward, the benefits offered by these linkages (including transport, work patterns and personal relationships), anchored in the distinctiveness of the coast, should not be overlooked.

Finally, we must also remember holidaymakers and visitors. This is a time of considerable change in holiday and leisure choices, which may well persist. The coastal communities of the North West need to maximise the opportunities associated with this trend. The 6.8 million residents and large urban population with access to the coast provides an excellent and enduring opportunity for the future of the visitor economy of the North West's coastal communities.

It is apparent that the coast will play a major part in the economic future of the region. It is also hugely important environmentally and provides a wide range of opportunities for recreation and leisure. The role that the coast plays in the future is therefore of key importance to policy makers throughout the region.

Division of Study Settlements by Typology by Sub-Region

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Large Urban Area

Maritime Towns

Working Towns by the Sea

Settlements of Choice

Cheshire

Ellesmere Port
Runcorn
Widnes

Neston

Cumbria

Barrow-in-Furness	Ulverston	Askham-in-Furness
Walney Island		Flookburgh
Kirkby-in-Furness		Haverigg
Maryport		Grange-over-Sands
Whitehaven		Ravenglass
Workington		Seascale
Allonby		St Bees
Millom		Arnside
Silloth		

Lancashire

Blackpool	Carnforth	Banks
Morecambe		Bolton-le-Sands
Fleetwood		Cleveleys
		Glasson
		Heysham
		Lytham & St. Annes
		Preesall
		Silverdale

Merseyside

Liverpool	Southport	Bromborough	Crosby
Bootle	West Kirby	Moreton	Formby
Birkenhead	Hoylake		Hightown
	New Brighton		Heswall

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