

Workshop - 'Dead in the winter'

This workshop considered year round communities: regeneration: seasonality: social exclusion: demographics. 30 participants joined this workshop.

Gary Smith from Transform (neighbourhood improvement initiative in Ilfracombe) started the workshop with an account of the issues that Ilfracombe faces. He spoke of:

- Loss of family seaside tradition and business,
- Hopes that new ITC business and industry would regenerate towns like Ilfracombe are not fulfilled,
- There is a drain of talent, low skills and low wages livelihoods,
- Cycle of decline,
- Large numbers of people in the town on benefits, many living in hostels,
- Change of use of buildings, although the town retained many of its fine buildings,
- But town not designed for cars: parking difficulties,
- Lack of facilities – no Boots or Woolworths in Ilfracombe,
- Lack of services – its miles and a long bus ride to reach services in Barnstaple (would be quicker to go over the sea to Swansea),
- There is also an ageing population – many of whom hang onto the idea that the old holiday industry way of life can be revived.

Following this presentation, participants were asked what are the issues that Devon coastal towns face. The issues from this discussion were then mapped on the wall. This is a summary of that work:

- There are opportunities outside the 'season'. See links to high value tourism below.
- We must make the most of natural assets.
- We need to secure coastal access in some places (e.g. in new development).
- Intervention is needed to raise skills of local workers to encourage employers e.g. niche small business.
- We especially need to involve heritage assets / areas / subjects e.g. making the most of coastal buildings and local distinctiveness such as Lundy MPA and Island and for opportunities such as the biosphere reserve.
- VAT issues prevent / deter year round opening of accommodation providers.

- Places / towns can develop their own special shops / retail niche e.g. surfing; sailing;
 - Shops like this can change hands quickly – not always successful.
- There is no night time economy, everything closes at 6pm.
 - We need night- time offers e.g. see the night sky.
- Small villages and hamlets need to build upon the strength of their environment e.g. beauty of place: local food for high value tourism.
- Tourism has changed e.g. the growth of the short breaks market.
- People now come to holiday complexes and stay there – they don't use local facilities.
- Transport links poor e.g. 'end of the line' seaside towns.
- There is no passing traffic but the isolation of some places contributes to their character and is part of their partial success.
- Old transport infrastructure.
- Getting materials in and products out is difficult.
- Long bus journeys required to get anywhere.
- Role of the ports.
- There are opportunities for 'bijou' developments on the waterfront and in ports which are often thought of as brownfield sites.
- However, these sites are not necessarily appropriate for this sort of development.
- We do need modern port facilities.
- Coastal towns need an individual and clear identity – and with vision. It's not the same answer everywhere.
- There has been poor take up of Objective 2 Euro funding opportunities.
- We must be more entrepreneurial and engage with communities better.
- Present round of Euro funding ends in 2006 and there is no sign of replacement or funding to carry projects forward.
- The price of fuel could result in potential fuel poverty.
- Fishing – need to adapt to changes in regulation and funding.
- Fishing – consider local food opportunities.
- Fishing it is not unskilled: it is undervalued.
- House prices - especially second homes issue.

- Is the original community as important as the 'new' community that comes with second homes?
- Encourage regeneration by importing 'big' enterprise e.g. the Met Office coming to Exeter
- Re-locate Government Departments to Devon
- Can we encourage second home entrepreneurs to stay and live here – become first home owners?
- Authorities squash entrepreneurial attempts

At the end of the workshop participants were asked to vote for the three issues that they felt most urgently needed to be addressed by a Maritime Forum. These were summarised as:

1. Transport links – end of line seaside towns.
2. Coastal towns need individual identity - with vision.
3. House prices. Second homes.