

12. WITHERNSEA:ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

February 2009

England
& Lyle



EAST RIDING
OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

12. WITHERNSEA: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contents

Page no.

Baseline Situation.....	2
SWOT Analysis.....	4
Relationship with Local Strategies.....	4
Role and Function.....	4
Land Use Issues.....	4
Management.....	4
Issues and Recommendations.....	5
Monitoring and Review.....	9
Appendix – Proposed Withernsea Town Centre Map	



BASELINE SITUATION

The Study has made an assessment of the baseline situation, identifying where Withernsea Town Centre is in terms of vitality and viability today. This is set out below to explain how Withernsea Town Centre is performing at present and to provide an indication of its direction of travel.

Overall Provision

The defining character of Withernsea is as a seaside market town. The town centre is focused along Queen Street, the main road through the town. The largest foodstore, Tesco, is located outside the town centre to the south but complements town centre shopping provision. There is little capacity for growth or change in or on the edge of the centre because of site constraints and we rate the capacity for growth or change as poor. There has been a slight improvement in the overall health of the town centre since the 2001 survey and its vitality and viability score is 3.0 (fair). It remains however the lowest scoring centre overall in the East Riding.



Diversity of Main Town Centre Uses

Shops represent 52% of all retail and commercial uses, which is higher than the national average of 44%, with convenience goods shops being at just above the national average. The centre is anchored by the Aldi supermarket at the junction of Queen Street and Station Road, with smaller McColls and Heron stores. The representation of comparison goods shops (41%) is also above the national average of 36%, and reflects the seaside character of the town centre. Correspondingly, the proportion of services (41%) is below the

national average, with the provision of business and office premises rated as poor. However, overall the presence of pubs, cafes and restaurants is good. Cultural attractions include the Lighthouse Museum and the Tourist Information Centre, beach and valley gardens. Withernsea has a large number of seaside amusement centres, mostly outside the town centre boundary.

Retailer Representation

The representation of multiples in the town centre is rated as fair. There is a limited variety of specialist and independent shops and a general lack of quality shops, though in the health check account has been taken of the fact that Withernsea has an outdoor market, . The availability of food shopping is good, including the main supermarkets and other food shops.

There is little evidence of recent investment by retailers and this factor is rated as poor. The presence of charity shops is not considered to be a problem. The consultation workshop commented that there is a very large proportion of low value goods on sale.

Vacant Properties

There are 7 vacant units in Withernsea and the vacancy rate is 9%, slightly below the national average and therefore the vacancy rate is rated as being fair. The overall vacancy rate has improved slightly from 10% in 2001.

Pedestrian Flows

The volume of pedestrian flow in the town centre at the times of our visits was poor. However, the town does become much busier in the summer. The consultation identified in particular the view that there was:
A lack of footfall and customers, particularly in winter months.

This is to be generally expected of most seaside towns.

Accessibility

Traffic movement along Queen Street conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists in the town centre. The workshop thought the town centre is dominated by cars rather than pedestrians and pavements are cluttered. Ease of access to the main attractions in the town centre from car parks and bus stops is good, including effective signage. Car parking is generally rated as being fair. There are frequent bus services to Hull, but the workshop thought that public transport is limited and we rate the frequency and quality of public transport and the range of places served by bus as fair. The level of public transport provision does vary however smaller settlements off the A1033 are not well served.



Customer Views and Behaviour

Despite the relatively low health check score, the household survey shows a high level of satisfaction with Withernsea town centre. The main likes are that it is close to home and has a friendly environment. Almost a quarter of respondents who visit Withernsea said there is nothing or very little they dislike about it. The main dislike expressed through the household survey is a lack of non-food stores but almost half of respondents said there is nothing or very little they dislike about the centre. The household survey is only a part of the wider health check however which has considered other matters such as the physical condition of the built environment.

Safety and Security

On safety and security we regard the feeling of security in the town centre as fair, Withernsea has a CCTV system.

Environmental Quality

The overall score on the physical appearance of retail and commercial properties is 2.9, on a possible score of 5. 44% of properties were rated as fair but a further 32% are poor. This is the same average score as in our 2001 survey and shows little change over the period. The conditions of buildings was discussed at the workshop which commented on the 'generally drab appearance of the town centre', with some buildings lacking investment. Overall cleanliness (litter and graffiti), the general pedestrian environment and the quality of open spaces/landscaping in the town centre are all rated as fair. The Valley Gardens is an attractive public space.



SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Traditional seaside market town provides defining character
- Compact centre close to residential areas, offering a range of services and facilities
- Constitutes a main transport hub and link in the Holderness coastal area
- The beach and seafront provide a valuable destination to attract visitors
- Opportunities for development

- Caravan sites – potential to contribute towards town centre trade
- A good range of shops and services on Queen Street
- Discount brand shops within the centre – Aldi and Poundstretcher
- Improved vitality and viability score since 2001



Opportunities

- Use seafront to full potential
- Withernsea in Bloom
- Enhancement of buildings in centre
- Expand tourist season and broaden the offer such as through ‘green tourism’

Weaknesses

- Seasonality of trade
- Lack of prosperity in centre reflected in condition of some buildings, lack of investment by retailers and nature of low value goods traded
- Street cleanliness problems

Threats

- Continued decline in physical environment and stagnation caused by lack of investment

RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL STRATEGIES

The recommendations in this report need to be coordinated with the Local Transport Plan, the Regeneration plan and the work of the Withernsea and Holderness Regeneration Partnership.

ROLE AND FUNCTION

This study has identified Withernsea as being a District Centre within the East Riding hierarchy. The centre acts as a local service centre for the towns residents and visitors. The identified role reflects a number of factors: the range and number of shops and services; total turnover and percentage of total turnover of the centre and the functions performed by the centre and the fact that it has a relatively low level of vitality and viability.

Withernsea has been identified as being one of the nine District Centres in the East Riding in this study. Withernsea has been found to be one of the less prosperous centres in the East Riding in a relatively remote location and has the lowest vitality and viability score.

Whilst the town centre has been found to have no dominant role, it is clearly a seaside market town with local retail, service, tourist and leisure roles. The seaside market town character makes the centre particularly distinctive within the range of centres in East Riding as a whole. The town centre has been found to have relationships with Hedon and with Beverley and Hull, particularly in respect of comparison goods shopping. The mix of roles performed are likely to continue into the future, although one could question the sustainability of the centre as a ‘seaside market town’ has to be questioned unless the matters identified in this report are addressed

The following case studies referred to in Section 2 are of particular relevance to Withernsea in terms of best practice in market towns:

- Sussex 5 Towns Network
- Selsey High Street Vision and Action Plan

LAND USE ISSUES

Any future development opportunities to meet the modest capacity of retail development in Withernsea town centre would appear to be limited in the shorter term to within the existing town centre boundaries. Expansion towards the seafront is constrained by the Coastal Zone protection boundaries identified in the adopted Local Plan and expansion southwards is constrained by protected open space adjacent to the hospital. Existing housing already straddles the northern and western town centre boundaries.

The open market site, pictured right (identified as underperforming in the health check and consultations), the adjacent car parking areas and the Pottery site south off Piggy Lane would appear to form sensible opportunities for future development within the southwestern corner of the existing town centre boundaries. The existing row of amusement arcades /



seaside tourism-related businesses along Memorial Avenue should be incorporated into the town centre boundary, opening the town centre up onto the seafront area. The bus depot off Seaside Road may provide a longer term redevelopment opportunity on the northern edge of the town centre. There is a need to incorporate the church and recently built Shores Centre – an important venue for community, business enterprise and training – as part of the town centre. Overall it considered appropriate to expand the boundaries of Withernsea town centre on a small scale as illustrated on the plan.

It is proposed that the primary shopping area is defined to comprise Queen Street between Hull Road and Station Road/Pier Road. The primary shopping frontages are identified along the north side of Queen Street between Seaside Road and Pier Road, and along the south side of Queen Street between Seaside Road and Station Road.

MANAGEMENT

The town centre has been slowly improving in terms of its vitality and viability, but there a need for the improvement to be hastened, with a step change in the health of the centre, as Withernsea recorded the lowest score for any of the centres assessed. This is likely to involve tackling fundamental issues such as that of seasonality which underlie the problems faced in the town.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultation undertaken for this study revealed a number of views and perceptions and issues relating to the centre. These matters are considered below.

Culture and heritage	
<i>Issues</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Lack of awareness of events taking place in the town	Continue to promote events and the centre, both locally and in the sub region, how should this be done?

Development	
<i>Issues</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Lack of development opportunities for town centre expansion, particularly if the market site is redeveloped for housing.	The development opportunities are limited, but the land use recommendations above cover the possible sites to be considered in the LDF.
Small units on offer limit the types of businesses that can move into the town centre	Consideration should be given to providing larger units if demand warrants it.

Economy			
<i>Issues</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>		
<p>Seasonality is considered to be the root cause of many of the town centre issues. This causes a fall in visitors during winter. The town is dependent on tourist trade.</p>	<p>The performance of Withernsea as a ‘seaside market town’ has to be questioned given its low health check score and the findings of this study which together have led to that score.</p>		<p>Seasonality is certainly a significant issue, and is likely to be at the root of why there are many shops trading on low margins, lacking money for investment and selling low value goods. Efforts should be made to reduce the impacts of seasonality by increasing trade outside of the main periods as outlined above. There are examples of small declined seaside centres which have achieved this including St Ives in Cornwall, albeit with the help of significant inward investment from the Tate.</p>
<p>Low footfall and customers generally. Withernsea lacks indoor venues to develop more activities</p>	<p>It is recommended that dependence on seasonal custom needs to be reduced. To do this, the various roles performed need to be strengthened in addition to bolstering the tourist function, to improve year round performance and sustainability.</p> <p>It is important to broaden the length of the tourist season too however, given the significant role which tourism still plays. This requires new vision for the centre and links with tourism and economic development strategies.</p> <p>It is considered that the town centre would benefit from great promotional activities in order to try to achieve an improvement in the number of visitors throughout the year.</p>		<p>This would be a long term measure. Initially that the nature and extent of seasonality can be understood, with specific measures and strategies being identified. This is a matter that needs to be addressed through the Regeneration Strategy.</p> <p>Sustainable tourism and branching out into more specialist tourism markets such as wildlife tourism given the proximity of Spurn Head and the Humber Estuary is being worked on at present and this work should be progressed.</p>

Perception of a very large proportion of low value bric-a-brac type goods on sale with low profit margins.	Observation confirms this. This however reflects the nature of the centre as a seaside town and should be addressed as above. The seaside town qualities however present opportunities for marketing and enhancement and should be a selling point for the town. The centre should however be promoted as a potential location for traders.
Workshop identified that the seafront is not considered to be used to its full potential for trade	Continue to realise potential for this whilst seeking not to undermine the existing centre.
Potential expansion of Tesco store. Residents are tending to do main and top up food shopping at the out of centre Tesco and not in town centre, particularly caravan site residents, which is adjacent to Tesco	Tesco found to be complementary to the centre in the study. Any expansion plans however need to be considered in the context of the assessment undertaken in the study to ensure that the vitality and viability of the centre is not adversely affected.
Traders' views and shared priorities as a collective group (e.g. Chamber of Trade) in order to attract funds from external sources	The engagement of traders in the management of the town centre should be encouraged. Integration of a traders group into the South Holderness Business Forum (an existing proactive business group across the sub area) – potential for Retail Chamber

Environment	
<i>Issues</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Perception that the town centre is dominated by cars rather than pedestrians and pavements are cluttered	The management of transport in the town has been examined previously in the Local Transport Plan. Consideration should be given to making the centre more pedestrian friendly whilst providing the required access and parking in the town centre.
Street cleanliness – issues raised with discarded packaging and cigarettes from pubs and take-away outlets. An increased number of litter bins (27) are due to be installed.	Assess whether there is an issue of perception or an actual problem across the year as our assessment was undertaken outside of the main season, and if so its nature and location. Monitor effectiveness of new bins in dealing with any problem identified and review as appropriate as to whether other measures would be required.
Generally drab appearance of town centre - some buildings lacking investment and in a bad state of repair above the shop front and road and pavement surfaces are often replaced with inconsistently applied materials (e.g. paving and tarmac) The town's general built and street environment is in need of investment to develop a higher quality product to allow it to compete with other local towns.	The provision of funding to improve the appearance of property in the town centre should be investigated as an important element of increasing the overall vitality and viability. The key way of achieving an improvement in the health check score is considered to be to improve the physical condition of the centre. It is noted that the previous shop front improvement scheme was not a success, but efforts should be continued to pursue this. A programme of environmental improvement should be pursued including the measures outlined above aimed to tackle the identified litter problem.

<p>Between 2002/4 a shop front improvement scheme was run by a Single Regeneration Budget programme with up to 75% grant for shop front improvements. However this had very little take up from the owners.</p>	
<p>Withernsea in Bloom – could be expanded to provide hanging baskets along Main Street and planting along main routes increasing the attractiveness of the town centre.</p>	<p>Support to be provided to Withernsea in Bloom especially in broadening the range of contributors to include more commercial interests within the town centre and to expand their activities accordingly and engagement with scheme in wider community.</p>

Transport	
<i>Issues</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
<p>Perception that traffic circulation and parking management arrangements need to be reviewed. There are said to be inconsistencies between enforcement activity on illegal loading activities by some shops (not applied) and customer car parking restrictions (over applied) Generally poor design of traffic management arrangements through the town centre</p> <p>Loading problems causing tail-backs along Queen Street during peak times.</p>	<p>Regeneration partnership are developing an action plan for the area, which is likely to investigate a one way system with the road reduced to a single carriageway and the widening of pavements and a clear out of road traffic and other similar signage; and, - the proposed development of the sea front.</p> <p>The Action Plan should be completed and coordinated in the Local Transport Plan</p>
<p>The absence of a coach drop-off point for visitors and tourists was raised in the consultation</p>	<p>The provision of a coach drop-off point should be given consideration in any traffic management scheme if need is evidenced and pursued through the Local Transport Plan.</p>

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The performance of the town centre should be monitored on an annual basis with the following key indicators being monitored against the baseline set out in this report so that any trends can be identified and acted upon promptly against triggers to be developed by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

- Changes in the number and type of town centre units
- Number of multiple retailers
- Number of visitors to the town at different times of year
- Litter and street cleanliness
- Changes in retail floorspace
- Number of charity shops
- Vacancy rate compared to baseline and national average rate
- Number of car parking spaces
- Physical appearance of properties (average score).
- Review and monitor the regeneration town centre plans to redevelop traffic flows and to improve the general public space and private shop frontages.

Map Key:



Primary Shopping Area



Primary Shopping Frontage



Proposed Town Centre Boundary



Existing Town Centre Boundary (where applicable)



Potential Development Opportunity