

RESPONSE TO HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE CALL FOR EVIDENCE REGENERATING SEASIDE TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES

Council is always keen to respond to consultation, and I have been authorised to write as follows:

Background:

Snettisham is a village in NW Norfolk with a population around 2,700. Though the centre of the Village is 4km inland, there is a smaller settlement nearer the coast, and several hundred caravans and beach homes – with various occupancy – and a shoreline of 6km within the Parish boundary. Though still very much a rural village, we rely on tourism for much of our income. There is a significant, and growing, second-home issue in the Village – though not as high as some neighbouring parishes, this is creeping along the coast. It is an issue we have attempted to address in our Neighbourhood Plan, which is in its final stages prior to referendum.

Responses to listed points:

1

Housing & Employment – the desire to retire to the coast causes issues with services related to health; we have a high proportion of over 65s, yet our medical provision is limited. There is always concern that development of housing is not matched by improvements in other infrastructure, and residents do not understand how the provision of e.g. medical services seems to be governed by commercial consideration after the event, rather than strategic planning prior to large numbers of additional residents arriving. This also applies to transport etc. Those wishing to have a holiday home put pressure on house prices, making it difficult for locals to get on the housing ladder, doubly so since many local jobs are poorly paid, being in the (often seasonal) service sector.

As coastal communities are inevitably restrained on one side, larger distances are involved in commuting, and transport tends to be parallel to the coast – the hinterland can become cut off, and car use essential – again young people can find getting to employment difficult, even if they can find a job.

2

We are aware that research had been carried out on seaside towns, and help has been provided. However, this seems to have been focused on places regarded as “resorts”. Locally we have Hunstanton, where large sums are being spent on such analysis; this is leading to investment by national and district bodies. However, those villages without the traditional promenade and “bucket and spade” base are definitely poor relations, in both research and investment. This is increasingly resented, as what such villages offer is a significant part of the huge Norfolk tourist economy, and can continue year round, unlike the family holiday resort.



3

We do not have specific problems with the nature of housing stock, though affordable housing can be a problem. Small villages tend to get smaller developments, and, as a result, contributions towards affordable housing are often in cash, and used in the larger towns in the district. New housing is therefore unaffordable but the solution is not within the local community – this leads to a drain of younger people, and difficulty filling seasonal posts. Housing stock designed for the second home market is not always best suited to local needs, even if locals could afford it.

4

Transience is less of a problem for our own village as we have a more year-round pattern of visits, given the wildlife etc. in the parish. Other local communities are not as fortunate.

5

There are still massive issues with mobile telephony, and, with the increase in services provided online, this is certainly holding back development. Transport is a perennial problem – while we have long appreciated that some parts of the year are going to be busy, our local A149 road is now suffering year-round. Further, road spending around the hub of King's Lynn needs to be improved to allowing freer-flowing traffic around it, and prevent local services locking up – due to the lack of alternatives, a single accident can actually cause traffic meltdown. All our main access roads are being continually disrupted with roundabouts, which are rarely a solution. We are increasingly hearing that people will not return because of the difficulty of getting here, a concern given the nature of the economy.

6

We are not aware of any encouragement for the tourism agenda in our own village, with the exception of some interest from Norfolk CC in working with us on footpaths. We believe more could be done to help communities which do not have the pull of major resorts; there is understandable resistance to residents' precepts paying for services for the visitors (e.g. we have no lavatories at the Beach).

7-9

We are not aware of tools and resources being provided to help us. Rather, more and more constraints seem to be being imposed. E.g. there is an area of our Village, near the Beach and at risk from tidal flooding, where housing stock is poor. Residents seeking permission to improve dwellings, including safety improvements, lose occupancy rights – this discourages such work, and so, ironically, rules intended to increase public safety actually make people less safe. Regeneration of an area requires a mix of demographics – as indicated previously encouragement of this is not really evident – quite the reverse in many cases. Local businesses require staff and the ability to get from a to b. As indicated, this is becoming increasingly difficult. Hence business becomes more focused on the holiday trade, and more vulnerable.



10

We are not large enough to have a secondary school in the Village. Our local one (Hunstanton) has recently lost its sixth form, and 16-18 year olds now have to travel into Lynn. This is not sustainable in planning terms, and is increasingly difficult due to congestion referred to above. It also has a knock-on effect that it makes good staff less likely to move to an area if they cannot have sixth-form teaching. Our local primary school has recently improved, due to increased spending – this has encouraged parents to regard it as viable, and numbers have gone up – a virtuous circle.

11

As a Parish Council, we are not aware of specific health issues. What we do understand is the lack of provision, and the problems for GPs relating to a higher proportion of older people – this is another matter which has been quoted in relation to the difficulty of attracting doctors. In all three local surgeries, waiting lists are at maximum.

12-14

Coastal Community funding reaches only those larger resorts, as above. Suggestions of “vision” and allowing government departments etc. to work on our behalf are simply inappropriate. We do not need Whitehall advising us. There is sufficient intent to achieve things locally, with help – this should be in the form of funding which is easy to apply for and which can then be controlled and directed locally.

15-16

Given the small sizes of our communities it is vital to have public engagement and support. In the main we achieve this, but there is a resistance to getting involved as people generally have become more inclined to feel that they cannot make a difference. There are examples of good practice and co-operative working, but it must be observed these are often focused on a few individuals pulling together and having the determination and persistence to push a project through. Structures often prevent this, so flexibility of approach should be encouraged.

From the above, areas we would like see a focus on:

- Specific policies to discourage excessive second-home ownership – this cannot be left to Neighbourhood Plans alone.
- Anything which can help remove mobile phone black-spots – co-ordination between suppliers etc. would really help. It is unacceptable to be reading about funding for 5G in much of the country when locals cannot even make a phone call here.
- Dualling the A47 to the Midlands, including around King’s Lynn, with free-flow junctions the norm.
- Being careful to consider the unintended consequences of legislation, as with occupancy rights.



- Focus indeed on the strengths of coastal communities such as tourism, but ensure that this is not to the detriment of other commercial activity which can operate year-round, and is not weather-dependent.
- Encourage professional people to move to the coast; stress lifestyle gains. Many of our problems relate to the unwillingness of those in medicine or education etc. to consider living and working here.
- Actually delivering on the idea of localism; allow communities to seek assistance for projects developed locally, rather than imposing ideas developed elsewhere, and which continually change according to political agendas.
- Anything which can be done to make people feel empowered would be of benefit; we know many new policies have to measure their effects on listed criteria (human rights, equalities) – perhaps how local people are empowered should be added to these.

Finally, we have recently spent much time here on one issue. We are an “at-risk” area for coastal flooding. A suggestion was made that we should help with funding sea-defences locally.

Without going into enormous detail, this raised several issues:

- The coastal defences are a national resource, and should be funded nationally as with other infrastructure – we pay for motorways and HS2 through our taxes, yet will derive little or no benefit from them.
- No consideration was given to how this might work at a local level – in fact there was even a question as to whether it was legal; bizarrely the Department recommended parishes get their own legal opinions...
- The multiplicity of agencies involved meant that no actual savings would be made – in fact, there would be massively increased administrative costs, but of course this would never actually show up, spread as it would be across so many levels of government!
- The fact that individual parishes were requested to do this was nonsense – the fact is that flooding does not respect parish boundaries. Inland parishes which were not themselves flooded would still suffer if road and other communications were cut.
- It was another example of a “good idea” in Whitehall actually being absurd on the ground, yet no one bothered to check.

Finally, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on these matters, on which I have only been able to touch briefly. We are more than happy to host a visit or answer questions from any of your Committee.

Simon Bower
Parish Clerk
9/8/18, by email



