

Hunstanton Civic Society

Response to Core Strategy Regulation 25 Document for the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk

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General Observations

The response of the Civic Society includes but is not restricted to the following comments because the Society wishes to engage in an ongoing dialogue. Furthermore government policy is that the core strategy and associated LDF submissions must be flexible and adaptable to meet ever-changing circumstances and not be regarded as a rigid unchanging strategy.

The principles behind the national planning guidance including the Core Spatial Strategies (SS1 through to SS9) seem laudable and well founded. They have been developed into the East of England Plan and clearly underpin the Borough Council's Core Strategy Regulation 25 Document.

As with most things, the devil is in the detail. The Core Strategy is what it says; it gives a broad-brush overview of the direction forward in the Borough.

The development of Site Specific Allocations and Policies will require intensive involvement of the local communities and businesses as provided for in Planning Policy Statement 12 paragraph 4.20 (PPS12) *The production of core strategies should follow the Government's principles for engagement of the community in the planning process.*

Involvement should be:

- *appropriate to the level of planning;*
- *from the outset – leading to a sense of ownership of local policy decisions;*
- *continuous – part of ongoing programme, not a one-off event, with clearly articulated opportunities for continuing involvement;*
- *transparent and accessible – using methods appropriate to the communities concerned; and*
- *planned – as an integral part of the process for making plans.*

King's Lynn as the Key Centre and economic driver.

Development of King's Lynn in this direction will be seriously hampered unless quite bold measures are put in place to tackle the problems of access and the lack of short term parking within or adjacent to its commercial centre.

Fortunately the Core Strategy has recognised that for the foreseeable future, residents in relatively sparsely populated rural areas will find that travel by car is a social and economic necessity.

It must be recognised that Hunstanton is a small vibrant community in its own right, with potential for development in a manner that respects its character and appearance and that would make it a better place in which to work and live. Previously published strategies largely ignore these needs and regard the town as an income generator to meet aspirations for King's Lynn. Wrongly such focus neglects the unique potential of Hunstanton and levels of inward reinvestment do not fairly match potential or actual income generated to date.

Problems with King's Lynn's infrastructure, services and transport networks dictate for instance that residents from Hunstanton and its rural hinterland often travel to Fakenham or Norwich in preference to King's Lynn to access services. The more accessible parking at Watlington makes it easier to join rail

services there when travelling onwards to Cambridge or London. There would be support for a Parkway Station in the Saddlebow area.

An hourly express bus service from Hunstanton with guaranteed connections with rail services would be a first step.

Measures to improve King's Lynn's traffic flow around the one-way system are essential as are measures to reduce the congestion along London Road and through Gaywood.

It is important that no further development is permitted along the track beds of the former railway lines including the lines to the Docks. These should be re-utilized as part of a Park and Ride scheme or within a rapid transit system linking King's Lynn to Hunstanton with access points to serve the rural communities in between. If the use of the former track bed is not feasible, consideration should be given to laying track on top of a sea-defence barrier. Either way, it would help to ease the present traffic congestion and access problems.

The railway exhibition in Hunstanton last Summer established that there would be strong support for a heritage steam railway linking to Network Rail in King's Lynn. This would be a huge tourist attraction but not preclude the use of the same track with modern rolling stock for commuting.

Consideration should also be given to the possibility of a Hovercraft service in the Wash linking Hunstanton with King's Lynn and possibly Boston and Skegness.

The news that the Communities Infrastructure Fund (CIF) has awarded King's Lynn £ 5.3 million is obviously good but we await details of how the money is to be used.

Policy approach to development in Hunstanton

As a result of the vision of Henry Styleman le Strange, Hunstanton developed as a model town and seaside resort in the nineteenth century. It is very regrettable that several of the important features of that heritage have been lost in the past 50 years viz. the boating lake, lido, railway station (closed 1969), Sandringham Hotel, pier destroyed in a storm 1978 and successive local authorities have managed only piecemeal and partial redevelopment since.

The Civic Society is dedicated to preserving and enhancing what remains of the original heritage, whilst actively encouraging and overseeing plans for its future. Hunstanton must retain its unique character and appearance that gives pleasure to its residents and visitors alike. Its open spaces are a large element needing protection and management.

Any policy for the Town needs to consider the differing interests of 4 groups of people

1. Local inhabitants including the large number of retired elderly people who have chosen to live in the area.
2. Surrounding rural communities dependent upon Hunstanton for certain services, shopping and entertainment.
3. Holiday makers, second home owners, day trippers
4. The business / commercial / light industry community – shop keepers, entertainers, hoteliers and landlords

Needs of Families – Crèches, Playgrounds, Infant School, Scouts / Guides, Church groups, Shopping, quality local food and fish, Cycle lanes, Safety, Good secondary education, Youth facilities, opportunities for sustainable local, year-round part and full time employment, affordable housing.

Needs of more elderly - Peace & tranquillity, ability to enjoy and access the area of outstanding natural beauty, safety, low crime rate, low noise levels, leisure facilities, further education, easy access to

shopping and services, quality primary and secondary health care, social support, meals on wheels, accessible transport, 24/7 social housing, residential and nursing homes.

Rural Communities surrounding Hunstanton need – easy access and parking in Town, leisure facilities, quality shopping and services.

Second Home owners value – good access to the area, low crime rate, safety, security, quality shopping, good tradesman / property management, good environment.

Day-trippers – good access to the area, clean beach and sea, cafes and kiosks, amusements, entertainments, leisure activities.

Holidaymakers – (as above) but also hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, good environment.

Business Community

Enjoys reasonable access for customers and deliveries, conducive trading environment but is limited by parking and lack of integrated traffic strategies.

The Civic Society fully supports the implementation of the Shop Front Guide (2008)

A recent survey found that few of the shop workers and for that matter shop owners actually live in the Hunstanton and many people leave the Town to work in King's Lynn.

An indoor market or a market in a fully pedestrianized High Street would be a welcome asset.

It is very regrettable that a number of commercial sites have been allowed to lie fallow for years; these are like bomb sites and seriously detract from the town's overall appearance.

The policies should be designed to achieve one or more of the following : -

1. Preservation & promotion of Hunstanton's unique Heritage as a Victorian Seaside resort.
2. Development of Town Centre as a hub to serve local people.
3. Promotion of the resort as a tourist centre with an extended season

Visitors to the Town may be the lifeblood for some of the business people but many day-trippers make little use of the town centre shops.

Many local residents have a real appreciation of the beauty and tranquillity of the area which conflict with the noise, pollution, congestion, crowding, parking problems, litter, yobbish behaviour, graffiti, vandalism and crime associated with some of the tourist trade.

Conflicts of interest would be minimised if Local government carefully assessed what the majority of residents want for their town or village and then concentrated all available funds on delivery of services and facilities the residents will use on a year-round basis. This will attract tourists who value similar things.

There is qualified support for the proposal to promote a new style of design for the Southern Seafront area provided that it does reflect high quality architecture and gives the area a distinct character. A too great an intrusion of unplanned and unattractive solutions presently is permitted.

Education – aim to improve and adapt skills to meet changes in employment. Support expanded primary school, Smithdon High School, youth clubs and sporting facilities, heritage trails, further education and broadband / wireless connectivity. It should be possible to utilize the experience and skills of the retired population to assist in the education process.

Housing – support re-use of brown field sites and limited new development of affordable housing on East of A149 - needs to be linked to year-round employment opportunities and appropriate

infrastructure. Only community growth will foster opportunities that attract / retain key and young workers and their families in the area.

We would support a restriction on the percentage of houses that are used as second homes.

Employment – Innovation Centres to assist new business start-ups.
Development of the Town as a Conference Centre.

Transportation – Improve the safety of the A149 past Smithdon High and Glebe schools, the recreation ground and through Old Hunstanton. (See earlier section on links with King’s Lynn)
Cycle ways preferable separated from traffic flows should be promoted within the town and linking with adjacent neighbourhoods.

Parking - In order to support a vibrant town centre, a comprehensive parking policy is needed. This must permit easy access to the shops and services particularly for the elderly with limited mobility and people from the surrounding rural area. Preference should be given to such people with free short stay (up to 30 or 40 minutes) on and off street controlled parking. Payment should be required for parking along Cliff Parade and for longer stays in less central locations.
Consideration should be given to a Park & Ride scheme with parking either on the Cliff Top or a new parking area behind Smithdon High School. In addition a circular bus service or Dial a Ride scheme around the town could permit elderly people to reach the shops and services without using their cars.

Conservation Area and the Green

The Civic Society has requested that The Green be formally registered as a Town Green under the provisions of the 2006 Act to protect it from any further intrusions that might otherwise be permitted by the Borough Council.

The amusement arcade and bowling alley built in 2002 should be relocated and the building that is wholly inappropriate to its prime site location should be dismantled. The site was reserved for ‘Hunstanton Pier and nothing else whatsoever’.

Re-designation of an enlarged Conservation Area and strengthening of its constitution to be enforceable is required.

Cultural and Leisure Facilities

The Promenade, Princess Theatre, Recreation ground, tennis courts, cricket pitch, skateboard park, water sports, Esplanade gardens, Boston Square Sensory garden, Pitch & Putt, Bowling Greens, Golf course, allotments, Oasis centre, Town Hall are all appreciated and promote community cohesion.

Heritage - The Society wishes to see the original name of the town Hunstanton St. Edmund’s restored, it considers a statue of Henry Styleman le Strange would be appropriate and development of a museum.

Sea defences / Marine environment / Renewable Energy

It should be noted that BCKL&WN elected to take responsibility for sea defences on Hunstanton sea front but has done little to meet amended standards and requirements instituted by DEFRA in areas it is responsible for; The dual role of sea defence and promenade are difficult but not impossible to combine. Additional risk areas have been created through a lack of coordination with DEFRA’s work already undertaken.

There is particular concern about the rate of preferential cliff erosion just to the North of the end of the promenade.

The Society definitely supports the redevelopment of the Sailing Club’s facilities on the North Prom.

The areas shown in Figure 10 of the East of England plan that are subject to flood risk are alarming as they extend all around King’s Lynn and across the Fens to Peterborough and Cambridge. This is reflected in the diagram on page 92. The fact that the actual risk has been the subject of an in depth study by Fabel and Maunsell is slightly reassuring.

It should be noted, however, that in their conclusion they state: -

- That because substantial improvements will be necessary to the Borough's tidal flood defenses, both along the shores of the Wash and within the tidal outfall channel of the Great Ouse, to maintain the standard of flood defence throughout the Borough at its present level, the Borough Council makes vigorous and persistent representations to ensure that these improvements are made. These improvements should be implemented in a programme of works that will ensure that tidal defence standards are maintained at or above present (2008) levels and are not permitted to fall below present defence standards at any time in the coming hundred year period.

At a meeting of the Wash Estuary Strategy Group, the question could not be answered as to whether the Wash was becoming deeper as a result of raised water levels or the sinking of the East of England or possibly becoming shallower because of silting.

Although the tidal rise and fall in the Wash is not as great as in the Severn Estuary, there seems to be great potential for harnessing the gravitational effects of the Moon to produce energy using under water turbine blades or turbines incorporated in a Wash Barrage.

The Civic Society would approve of a detailed scientific study of the possible benefits and potential disadvantages of construction of a Wash Barrier to generate tidal hydroelectric power. It could protect low-lying land now at risk of flooding and permit development to be less constrained. A much safer and controlled environment for water sports could be created. There is no doubt that there would be marked changes in the environment, some of these might be undesirable but many others extremely beneficial providing huge opportunities for all Wash Bay communities. Such a barrier might carry a road or rail link to Lincolnshire and offer opportunity for a deep water port and associated commercial / business infrastructures and increase the limited catchment areas of King's Lynn and Hunstanton northwards. Without intervention, it should be noted that changes in climate are going to have profound consequences for the relatively fragile environment.

AAOB / SSSI

Obviously the scenery, flora and fauna are essential elements of the attractiveness of the area and must be preserved but not necessarily at any cost. Many visitors come to watch birds.

Hunstanton Town Centre and Southern Seafront Masterplan

The proposals of the firm Building Design Partnership (BDP) are broadly welcomed. We are pleased to note that the Masterplan confirms that the existing non-pier building severs the promenade, it is visually unattractive, out of scale and detracts from its setting as part of the conservation area. The suggested enlargement illustrated in fig. 3.16 is totally inappropriate.

The report notes the problem of connecting the Seafront with the Town Centre but does not provide a solution. A suggestion to overcome this difficulty is to construct an iconic tower with a lift and spiral staircase and possibly a helter-skelter at the North end of the Beach Terrace Road car park. This could be part of a new hotel with high-level restaurant over looking the Wash and its water sports. A level walkway / skyway could then oversail Le Strange Terrace, connect with a new development on the vacant Garage site before going over St. Edmund's Terrace and ending in the middle of the High Street. This would seem to meet or exceed the best practice Urban Design principles (UD1, 2 &3)

We would welcome re-routing the bus services 40 and 41 to better serve visitors and residents and free the existing bus terminus for new development.