

From ebb to flow:

How entrepreneurs can turn the tide for Britain's seaside towns

A report by the Centre for Entrepreneurs
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About the Centre

Launched in October 2013, the Centre for Entrepreneurs think tank promotes the role of entrepreneurs in creating economic growth and social well-being. It is home to national enterprise campaign, StartUp Britain.

The Centre is an independent non-profit think tank founded and chaired by Sunday Times columnist and serial entrepreneur Luke Johnson, and housed in the Legatum Institute - a non-partisan charitable think tank best known for its annual Prosperity Index.

It is supported by a prominent advisory board including serial entrepreneur and investor Brent Hoberman, angel investor Dale Murray, Supper Club founder Duncan Cheadle, Betfair founder Ed Wray, and finnCap founder Sam Smith.

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Foreword

Seaside resort towns feature some of our most magnificent and memorable landscapes and hold a special place in many people's hearts. They also face a unique set of challenges. Though there may be much diversity between them, they often share common factors including physical isolation, educational deficiencies, significant levels of deprivation and low-wage, low-skilled seasonal work. These factors are further compounded by ageing populations, decaying seafront infrastructure and a lack of digital connectivity.

The challenges faced by seaside towns have developed over several decades. Uncertainty from successive governments on how to arrest their decline have left them among the most deprived areas of the country.

But there are reasons for optimism and hope. New industries are replacing the old; technology is reconnecting these often marginalised communities and, at the same time, stemming the brain drain. A pioneering generation of entrepreneurs, investors, cultural institutions and local politicians are finding fresh relevance for these towns, harnessing their natural and architectural beauty in novel and imaginative ways.

Just as entrepreneurs built seaside towns, we believe that it is the invention and drive of entrepreneurs that can revive them.

In this report we identify and celebrate examples of entrepreneurs leading the reinvention of five seaside towns across the UK, and take lessons from their successes.



Luke Johnson

Chair, Centre for Entrepreneurs
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Our case studies also show that creative businesspeople alone cannot save these resorts. A combined effort is needed – one that brings together entrepreneurs, national government, local authorities and residents in identifying issues and opportunities, developing solutions, and taking action.

The solutions will be varied: from coastal devolution and investment in infrastructure – particularly broadband – to boosting educational outcomes and skills.

Ultimately, it is down to each of Britain's seaside towns to formulate the unique strategy – based on the town's identity – that will revive its fortunes. This report is aimed at sharing findings and making suggestions; it is not to provide a one-size-fits-all strategy for success.

Seaside towns will prosper because of individual imagination and initiative, not by top-down diktat. This is not to say that the state has no role to play in encouraging prosperity. But it is entrepreneurs who will lead the charge.

Summary of recommendations

Unless seaside towns reinvent themselves and find new relevance, they will be unable to keep up with the rest of the country. They have to be reintegrated into the UK economy, reinvigorated as towns attractive to private investment and as places of high economic value.

There are reasons to believe that this is already taking place. Some towns are pulling through, with community values serving them well. In many places, local people have come together to beautify common spaces or save a beloved structure. Visits are on the increase too: in the first quarter of 2015, visits to the seaside were higher than they have been in nearly a decade, with tourist spending increasing.¹

But a passive reliance on tourism will not be enough for seaside towns to fulfill their potential. What's needed – and what our case studies demonstrate – is a transformation in the way seaside towns view themselves, as well as how they educate their children and manage their infrastructure.

Seaside towns need entrepreneurs to bring ideas, jobs, and wealth to their communities; but entrepreneurs need talent, infrastructure, and public support to help them lead the revitalisation of seaside towns.

Our report puts forward the following recommendations as the best means of bringing about an entrepreneur-led revitalisation. To achieve them, we must ensure that key stakeholders in seaside towns – entrepreneurs, investors, government, educators and charities – come together with a common vision geared towards nurturing entrepreneurship.

Attractiveness

- **Identity:** Local authorities, businesses and tourist agencies should join together in forging unique identities for their towns. In an era where experiences and authenticity matter most, a unique proposition (whether food culture or literary sophistication) will be key in attracting entrepreneurs and professionals in search of something different.
- **Environment:** Local authorities, businesses, charities and citizens should collaborate in preserving and improving the local built and natural environment, so that seaside towns are seen as attractive places to work and live.
- **Activity:** A strong offering in sport and culture is essential in improving the attractiveness of Britain's coastal towns to entrepreneurs and quality of life for locals. All interested stakeholders should work together to shape a coherent cultural and sporting strategy that plays to local assets and preferences.
- **Accessibility:** Good existing transport links, if marketed appropriately, could increase the economic fortunes of many seaside towns by: (1) convincing entrepreneurs that they are practical places to base their operations (2) attracting the skilled professionals who want to maintain their links to the UK's cities (3) drawing in tourists and travellers looking for convenient ways to spend shorter breaks.
- **Optimism:** Make room for optimism, and communicate the stories of successful ventures and good fortune to help address the image and perception of seaside towns.

Education

- **The 'Challenge' model:** The government should consider launching a new 'Challenge' in deprived rural and coastal regions outside of England's cities, given their success in boosting educational outcomes in London, Manchester and the Black Country. For seaside towns, call it the 'Seaside Challenge'.
- **Charities:** The government should support and encourage charities – such as Teach First and the Education Endowment Foundation – that are working to improve educational standards in seaside towns, and ensure that the lessons learned inform and shape future policies.
- **Academies:** More secondary schools should consider becoming academies if the factors preventing improved performance (such as poor or constrained leadership, a lack of staff engagement, and a negative learning culture) would be best addressed by a more autonomous management style.

Information and transparency

- **Big data:** Programmes that rigorously map out national and local economic trends and opportunities (such as the government-backed Tech Nation programme that identified Bournemouth as a digital hub) should be implemented in a range of industries and regions, so that entrepreneurs can identify places to invest. These could be public, private or nonprofit initiatives.
- **Asset inventories:** There is a clear need for seaside towns to have publicly accessible asset inventories. In many towns finding out what exists and who owns it is far too difficult – a significant challenge for many prospective entrepreneurs. Local authorities should lead on this, given the assets they own as well as their ability to enable and coordinate data collection.

Government

- **Devolution:** Seaside towns, and the broader regions in which they are located, should be granted greater decision-making autonomy. These towns have unique characteristics and socioeconomic challenges for which probably they alone know the appropriate answers. Local elected mayors should be offered as a clear option.
- **Physical infrastructure:** Local and national authorities should continue and upscale their investments in physical infrastructure that will support entrepreneurship on the coast. The Coastal Communities Fund is a key component of this process. Local and national authorities should work together to improve transport links – the planned high-speed rail improvements for Hastings and Margate being positive examples. Local authorities should also invest in local public transport to better connect businesses, employees, tourists and consumers.
- **Digital infrastructure:** Investment in improvements that will support the growing digital sector are paramount, especially in the area of high-speed broadband. Authorities must also recognise that it is not just the cost and speed of the connection that is important, but the skills and capabilities of individuals and businesses. There must be a relentless focus on getting more businesses online, and on digital skills training.

Introduction

In 1920, around 10% of the UK's population took their holiday in the Lancashire seaside town of Blackpool. The town was known as 'the fine, frank, free, healthy and jovial holidayland' and 'the capital of the Empire's health and pleasure'.

Nearly a century later and Blackpool's ornate Victorian facades – which once hosted high society and then Lancashire's industrial workers – are home to some of Britain's most vulnerable people. Once marketed as a health retreat, Blackpool now has the highest alcohol-specific mortality rate for men in the UK. Its pleasure offering does not extend to the 1 in 66 children who live in care, nearly three times the national average.² The Blackpool of the 1920s remains only in the postcards and posters that first attracted its crowds.

Yet the history of the British seaside offering is more complex than that suggested by the story of "Victorian glory killed off by cheap air travel". Even in its heyday, Britain's seaside offering faced competition from home and abroad, with the Lake District and the Alps gaining popularity among the wealthy. Seaside resorts prospered not simply because of their natural beauty and rustic charm, but thanks to a dynamic combination of private ingenuity, public foresight, and far-reaching economic and societal transformations.

The history of Blackpool Tower vividly illustrates the success of the Victorian seaside. It speaks to the notion that these resorts were the embodiment of the 19th century private enterprise that had driven the Industrial Revolution. The Tower was a perfect specimen of Victorian engineering, bringing to mind the likes of Brunel's Great Western Railway. It was even funded in the spirit of capitalist enterprise. The Blackpool Tower Company was founded in 1890, and raised the capital to build the structure not just through a £30,000 injection from its parent company, but also from the sale of £100,000 of shares to ordinary members of the public, and investment from a former Mayor of Blackpool John Bickerstaff who became chairman of the company.³

Indeed, despite considerable obstacles, the Tower turned a profit in its first year, thanks to the entrepreneurship of its day – including a vision for Blackpool that everybody could, literally, buy into.

However, the real success of the resort was the unprecedented marriage of private enterprise and government support that made the development of Blackpool as a 'resort' possible. The state provided utilities, transport, promenades and even orchestras – the infrastructure in other words – while local entrepreneurs provided the products and services that employed the town's growing population.

It was a story repeated around Britain's coast – yet today, many seaside towns are shadows of their once illustrious selves. Battered by the loss of custom to resorts abroad and of brain drain to the cities, many are characterised by high levels of unemployment, welfare dependency, low levels of skill and education, weak aspirations, and an ageing population. Many have become go-to places only for the young unemployed and for local authorities looking to relocate the vulnerable – a trend driven by low property prices tied to a plentiful supply of housing thanks to the declining demand for once-bustling hotels and B&Bs.

Such deprivation makes it hard for these towns to change their fortunes. Poorly maintained and overcrowded housing, plus a lack of transparency regarding local assets, makes attracting investment extremely hard. A low-skilled, poorly educated population can make these towns an unattractive prospect for many businesses. For these towns to prosper once again, educational standards (and aspirations) will need to be raised, demographic trends reversed, and the industries of the future encouraged, leading ultimately to new job-creation.

It's a tall order, yet – around the coast – this is already happening in various resorts. The long-withered industries of old are giving way to the new, bringing with them opportunity and the hope of a positive future. Nearly always, the hope is coming from private enterprise and entrepreneurs, backed and encouraged by local authorities, government and citizens – reviving the public-private pact that was instrumental in Blackpool's development.

As entrepreneurial vision once brought the architecture of Paris to the Blackpool seafront, so too has it brought more recent change to the Sussex coast and Littlehampton. As we describe later in this report, one woman's vision for her small concrete waterfront kiosk, coupled with a chance encounter with designer Thomas Heatherwick, has transformed the town into an architectural destination.

Scarborough is another old seaside town that is feeling the benefits of entrepreneurship with a hat tip to the Victorians. Later in the report we profile the entrepreneur behind Dalby Offshore – which has grown dramatically in recent years – a man who is embracing the opportunities from the development of the large scale wind farm at Dogger Bank.

Driven by these entrepreneurs and by local authority and government investment in transport and communications infrastructure, Scarborough has seen a significant drop in seasonal unemployment in a short space of time. Just over a decade ago, winter unemployment was 50% higher than in the summer, but by 2008 this had fallen to just 10%.⁴ With Dalby Offshore on course to have created more than 200 new jobs in non-tourism industries, this could become a permanent, positive change.

The transformation and diversification of local economies is important not simply due to its contribution to tackling high unemployment, but also for the ability to reinvigorate the aspirations and ambitions of the local population. Creating any old job is not enough to breathe new life into these towns: the new economic activities have to inspire a new generation, and be relevant to the future industries that will bring sustainable growth to the coast.

It is for this reason that, we believe, entrepreneurs hold the ultimate key to a successful future for struggling seaside towns. In this respect, the success stories of Bournemouth and Brighton – with their 'Silicon Beaches' combining high-tech entrepreneurial opportunities with lifestyle – provide inspiration. Both towns have successfully mixed a traditional tourist offering with more sustainable and diverse economic activity. And, importantly, both towns have developed an identity that has attracted new

entrepreneurial blood. We believe that forging such an identity has been a crucial part of their success.

Of course, part of the identity is to retain the town's attraction as a tourist destination. Indeed, in the Empire's historic 'Pleasure Capital' of Blackpool, tourism is still vital to the town. Merlin Entertainments, which runs Madame Tussaud's and Alton Towers among other sites, now runs the town's main attractions. The group has done much to invest in updating attractions and package them as a destination offering. Visitor numbers are rising again for the first time since the early 1990s.⁵

Blackpool's resurgence as a holiday destination demonstrates the importance of marketing, investment, and the liberating force of private enterprise. It also proves that while the picture postcard of the 1920s resort may be consigned to the past, British seaside tourism is not. Competition has grown as a result of cheap air travel, but so too has the market. Modern affluence has brought with it the luxury of more than one holiday a year, and a larger appetite for mini or weekend breaks – often, crucially, in the UK. This change in the nature of holidaymaking has already begun to rejuvenate many seaside towns.

Yet the strength of the British seaside has always been its variety – the fact that British seaside towns present a diverse offering. Again, we think such diversity is key – with different towns attracting different entrepreneurial activities based often on how the town shapes its modern identity as a tourist destination. From the foodie retreats of Padstow or Portrush, to the art-lover's destinations of St Ives and Margate, the nightlife of Blackpool, the music of Aldeburgh and the sports of Newquay, the British seaside still has something for everyone. Many coastal towns are learning to thrive by establishing a unique proposition not only for their visitors, but also for attracting economic activity.

Such identity and creativity has always found its natural incubator in the minds of Britain's entrepreneurs, so it is apt that this report tells their story – the story of how some remarkable individuals and teams are creating jobs and reviving aspirations in seaside towns around the UK.

The story so far

While the specific challenges faced by Britain's coastal towns often play second fiddle to higher profile national concerns, they began receiving increased attention following the publication of a House of Commons report in March 2007, which investigated the apparent lack of coherent government policy toward these often highly deprived communities. That report triggered a debate that has led to a wave of publications on the topic, each with its unique angle and methodology. The following is an attempt to briefly summarise this continuously evolving debate.

Socioeconomic trends

The 2007 Commons report identified a list of common characteristics including material deprivation, physical isolation, poor quality housing, an ageing population and high levels of transience that it argued required urgent government attention.⁶

It was followed in 2008 by a benchmarking study on seaside towns by researchers at Sheffield Hallam University, who explored them in further depth. It found that the majority of the towns it investigated had deprivation levels higher than the English average while skill levels and achievement at school were also slightly below average.⁷

Employment in seaside towns actually grew faster than the national average between 1999 and 2006; by 7.5% versus 6.9% for England, although the employment rate on the whole remains worse than the rest of the country (72% versus 74% in 2006).

The 2011 government census provided updated data on socioeconomic and demographic trends in seaside towns. The results confirmed that the over 65s make up a larger share of the population in seaside towns compared to the national average (20% versus 16%), and that seaside towns have a lower employment rate (69% versus 71%). They also revealed a higher rate of long-term health problems, less ethnic diversity and fewer foreign-born residents, a greater reliance on part-time work, and a problem of unoccupied housing.⁸

A 2013 report from the Centre for Social Justice found that many seaside towns are undermined by self-reinforcing deprivation, caused by a lack of skills and aspiration, welfare dependency and vulnerability. Levels of poverty and welfare claims are higher than average, while "poorly maintained and overcrowded housing... makes attracting investment extremely hard". Some local authorities have taken advantage of the low property prices in seaside towns to relocate vulnerable adults, children and ex-offenders. The report concludes that job creation, better education, and attracting a younger skilled population will be key to seaside towns' recovery.⁹

Tourism

The 2007 Commons report emphasised the important economic role of tourism, which despite evidence of a decline and, in many cases, a loss of status remains an important industry in many coastal towns. It called for an improved national approach to supporting seaside tourism, but also acknowledged the need for economic diversification to create opportunities and reduce the seasonality of employment.

In 2014, another study from Sheffield Hallam¹⁰, focused specifically on seaside tourism, found that the industry directly supports 212,000 jobs, spread across six sectors of the local economy. It claimed that tourism had “weathered the post-2008 economic downturn relatively well, and even sustained the modest growth that was evident before the recession”.

Employment in seaside tourism was estimated to have increased since the late 1990s by around 1% a year – or by as much as 20,000 jobs. In terms of employment, it is comparable to the telecommunications sector and larger than the motor, aerospace, pharmaceutical and steel industries. On the other hand, the economic value of the industry is low (with a gross value added of £3.6 billion in 2009) compared to its employment levels – something explained by the prevalence of low-wage, part-time work in the sector.

Much depends on location, however. For instance, while Brighton’s tourist economy appears to be going from strength to strength, Blackpool has lost large numbers of tourist-related jobs (though this appears to be reversing). Smaller seaside towns also tend to be more reliant on the seaside tourist trade than their larger counterparts, meaning low wages, seasonal unemployment and a proliferation of small businesses are more common.

Entrepreneurship and business

While our report is the first to focus exclusively on the role of entrepreneurship in reviving seaside communities, a 2010 book on coastal regeneration featured a chapter on the role of enterprise and entrepreneurship.¹¹

It discusses a wide range of business support that exists in coastal towns – such as advice and guidance, information provision, financial assistance, incubation space, and training and networking – and argues that this mostly mirrors what one finds in non-coastal towns.

However, the authors do identify challenges that are specific to supporting and encouraging business development in seaside towns, particularly when it comes to attracting investment from the business community in regenerating resorts. This is rooted in seaside towns’ lack of both public and private funding, and in the predominantly negative perceptions of the towns, which are not seen as attractive places to work, live and learn.

Finally, the book laments the lack of publicly available studies that explicitly assess the effectiveness of enterprise support programmes in coastal towns, for without this evidence, “there is a danger that programmes are supply-led rather than demand-led” with all the economic distortions this produces. It calls for more structures by which agencies in coastal areas can exchange and share experiences, particularly in terms of how they can develop entrepreneurialism.





Our recommendations:

Enabling an entrepreneur-led revival

If they are to succeed, seaside towns must nurture local entrepreneurs and attract new enterprises.

Entrepreneurs provide the resilience and energy needed to revitalise these dormant economies. They are people who thrive on taking chances and solving problems, people with the ability and incentive to inject some much-needed fresh thinking into sleepy communities.

Beyond attracting those new to seaside towns, we should draw attention to the successful people returning to their seaside homes, proud of their own achievements and eager to play a part in their home town's future prospects. Such people can act as a bridge between seaside communities and the outside world in Britain and beyond. They are trusted by locals, understand local circumstances, and bring fresh contacts, experience and capital.

Local authorities, businesses and tourist agencies should join together in forging unique identities for their towns. In an era where experiences and authenticity matter

most, a unique proposition (whether food, culture or literary sophistication) will be key in attracting educated, high- skilled entrepreneurs and professionals in search of something different.

Entrepreneurship can generate investment, drive innovation, and create jobs. But entrepreneurs tend to operate in clusters that provide support services and a labour pool. If seaside towns can generate such clusters they can reverse the brain-drain and transform their self-image: helping attract further investment.

Human capital already existing in seaside towns must be fostered to encourage these people towards entrepreneurship, while established, successful, entrepreneurs and outside talent must be attracted by boosting business activity, perhaps towards a promoted entrepreneurial specialisation. There is also an important role for philanthropic activity in coastal communities.

Through our research we have identified several key areas in which seaside towns' attractiveness to entrepreneurs might be increased.

1. Forging a new identity

To bring in new people and influences, seaside towns must be seen as places with high standards of living and wellbeing. In Bournemouth, entrepreneurs now entice employees by promoting their unique working culture and the city's high quality of life.¹² Brighton also leads on lifestyle; something other towns can learn from. Seaside towns, in this respect - with their rich heritage, proximity to nature and local flavour - have a natural advantage. They can market themselves to young and edgy entrepreneurs looking for their own 'undiscovered' haven.

However, to compete, seaside towns need more than a beach. They need to develop individual identities that, literally, put themselves on the map. Many people's first thought when they hear 'Hay on Wye' is literature and books. When people hear 'Ludlow' they tend to think of food; 'Padstow' and it is fish; 'Aldeburgh' and it is classical music. All seaside towns must apply the same logic. As we will see, Littlehampton is the English destination for seafront architecture, while Hastings aspires to be the centre of skateboarding and BMX racing.

Such specialisations attract visitors but also help root businesses to the area - making the town a destination for a particular entrepreneurial activity. Modern tourism supports this, with more frequent, shorter holidays often revolving around particular activities or passions. Seaside towns are obvious magnets here - if they can find a specialist identity.

As we will see with Scarborough, this is not always tourism based. Coastal industries also count. Yet it is a specialisation that generates visitors, which feeds demand and therefore attracts entrepreneurship.

The town's role here is obvious. It needs to decide on its emerging specialisations - ensuring it's what is locally desired - and it needs to provide what's required to develop this. This includes:

- ensuring the local infrastructure is suitable;
- investing in the education and skills that will support the specialisation;
- providing and promoting suitable events (such as festivals) that embody the specialisation;
- promoting the specialisation's connection to the town.

Of course, culture is key to stimulating tourism and generating economic activity. A 2013 study commissioned by the Arts Council found that the arts and culture generate more per pound invested than the health, wholesale and retail, and professional and business services sectors; make up almost £900m of spending by tourists visiting the UK; and have grown since 2008.¹³ Other research has explicitly linked the regeneration of coastal towns to cultural tourism¹⁴, and suggested that this is most effective when universities, business and government pursue this together.¹⁵

The Labour government's 'Sea Change' programme, for example, aimed to "use culture to make a difference to seaside resorts." In its lifetime it directed £37m towards 34 cultural improvement projects around the coastline, ranging from a major restoration of Margate's Dreamland amusement park to a piece of seafront furniture in Littlehampton known as the 'World's Longest Bench' (see our case study on Littlehampton). The programme is estimated to have generated 700 jobs, while evidence suggests it catalysed wider regeneration to the tune of £276m.¹⁶ Although not extended by the Coalition government, these successes should be kept in mind when designing future cultural regeneration programmes.

In its first year, Margate's Turner Contemporary attracted three times as many visitors as expected, with 500,000 passing through its doors - making it the third most-visited attraction in Kent. A study found that in its first year it had benefited the Kent economy by around £14m, while Margate itself has seen a large upswing in property prices and new business starts.¹⁷ Hastings also recently opened its own prestigious art institution, the Jerwood Gallery, which, despite some local misgivings, has integrated itself into the local social fabric through initiatives such as gallery membership (two thirds are local) and programmes for volunteers and young people.¹⁸

A strong offering in sport is another important ingredient in improving the attractiveness of Britain's coastal towns, for visitors and residents alike. Outdoor activities like cycling, walking and running are consistently popular, while other sports once considered fringe like skateboarding, surfing and BMXing are now well established. Coastal towns provide the space and setting for those interested in taking part in such activities, but they also provide a spectacular backdrop for hosting international sporting events, such as the Isle of Man TT (motorcycle racing), the Tour de Yorkshire (cycling), or the British Open (golf) in Portrush. Seaside

towns should take note and do everything they can to offer a world class sporting package.

And let us not forget that natural and architectural assets make seaside towns potentially some of the most inviting, inspiring and invigorating areas of the country to live and work in. The built environment is a significant economic and cultural asset in all seaside towns.

Take Littlehampton, a town that has a large draw namely because of its impressive and varied architecture; or Hastings, where derelict swimming baths are turning into a subterranean skate park. Improving or preserving the attractiveness of the built environment in seaside towns is important and should not be overlooked or deemed a 'vanity project'. Furthermore, entrepreneurs can have a role to play determining how this is done and proposing innovative uses for these assets.

Equally, seaside towns should ensure that their natural heritage is the best it can be by devoting adequate resources to environmental protection and sustainable practice. A recent New Economics Foundation report¹⁹ (The New Blue Deal) links the prosperity of coastal communities to the quality of the marine environment, and recommends prioritising sustainable fisheries, renewable energy, tourism, innovative coastal management and promoting nature generally.

In short, we should make sure seaside towns are attractive places for everyone to live, work and visit.

2. Emphasising accessibility

Reasonable travel times, if marketed appropriately, could increase the economic fortunes of many seaside towns by:

- Convincing entrepreneurs that they are practical places to base their operations
- Attracting the skilled professionals who want to maintain their links to the UK's cities
- Drawing in tourists and travellers looking for convenient ways to spend shorter breaks.

The economic pressures that led many to leave their coastal and rural homes to pursue opportunities in the cities are weaker than they once were. While work in a manufacturing dominated economy was tied to a fixed workplace, in today's digital and innovation-driven economy it is flexible working that is increasingly the norm. Compared with cramped commutes, unaffordable property and high levels of pollution, coastal living is an enticing option for young and mature professionals alike. And as our case studies illustrate, living in seaside towns does not limit entrepreneurs from operating nationally or even internationally, provided they have a strong online presence and access to high quality broadband.

However, we also acknowledge that while innovations in connectivity make it easier for entrepreneurs and professionals to be based in seaside towns, many will have business and personal interests in other parts of the country (especially the major cities) requiring frequent travel. Fortunately, it turns out that some towns are already surprisingly well-connected.

To give a few examples: Brighton is less than an hour from London, while the capital can be reached in just under 40 minutes from Southend-on-Sea in Essex, which in 2013 boasted the highest property price rises in the country. Meanwhile, a recently approved high-speed rail extension from Ashford to Hastings will cut travel time between the latter and London from 90 minutes to 68 minutes,²⁰ while the Margate-London travel time (currently also 90 minutes) could be cut to 60 minutes if similar proposals are realised.²¹ The elegant seaside town of Southport, a popular resort known for its golf courses, is only 45 minutes away from Liverpool and an hour from Manchester.

Those seaside towns that are already well-connected should do their best to emphasise this to the outside world. However, many remain isolated, so there is clearly scope for upgrading transport links between seaside towns and surround cities, a point we make in a later section.





3. Tackling deficiencies in education

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing remote coastal communities is that the skilled workforce is either absent or ageing and in need of renewal. Certainly, unemployment is often compounded by education and skills deficiencies. Recent Ofsted reports show that coastal towns are some of the most educationally deprived parts of the country that have “felt little impact from national initiatives designed to drive up the standards for the poorest children”.²²

This has an effect in a number of ways. Sometimes educational institutions deliver, but only produce a small pool of top talent for businesses to recruit from. Other times the skills do not match what is needed in the local labour market. The long-standing brain drain of the best and brightest to Britain’s more dynamic cities compounds these issues.

This presents a significant challenge for seaside towns trying to turn their fortunes around. A low skilled population makes these towns a less attractive prospect for entrepreneurs and investors. However, there are initiatives that have the potential to arrest the downward trend.

Exporting the ‘challenge’ model

One of the most successful recent policies in improving educational outcomes was the ‘London Challenge’, launched in 2003 by the Labour government. Its goal was to have every young person in London receive a good or better education. Additional funding and a minister responsible for London schools were introduced.

At its peak, the London Challenge Programme had a budget of £40m a year, funding packages of support for underperforming schools, and was jointly brokered by an expert adviser and officials in the Department for Education. It invested heavily in school leadership via teacher development programmes and by providing consultant heads to struggling schools, and worked with London local authorities to shape planning and school improvement strategies. The programme was innovative in its use of data, which it used to track not only individual subject departments but also ethnic groups in evaluating school performance.

By 2005 the performance of London schools was above the national average, and it has continued to improve, with Ofsted declaring in 2010 that London had more good and outstanding

schools than any other part of England.²³ While it is difficult to isolate the impact of the Challenge against a backdrop of wider policy changes, several independent evaluations have emphasised the link; and the model was exported in 2008 to Greater Manchester and the Black Country – Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton – in the form of ‘City Challenges’. The record for these interventions is more mixed, but they have met many of their targets: the proportion of Good and Outstanding schools went up in both areas, despite the introduction of a more challenging Ofsted inspection framework.²⁴

Given their success in England’s cities, the possibility of launching further ‘challenges’ in deprived rural and coastal regions should be given serious consideration.

The role of charities

Individual charities are unlikely to solve seaside towns’ educational problems on their own, but they are responsible for many programmes that are doing a great deal to help the most educationally deprived students, and whose results can help inform future government policy.

Teach First, a charity that recruits bright graduates as teachers and places them in deprived primary and secondary schools (defined as those where more than half of pupils come from the poorest 30% of families), has grown and seen much success since its launch in 2002. Last year it announced that it would be expanding into poor rural and coastal areas following Ofsted’s warning that these areas were now the most educational deprived in the country. It has also broadened its definition of eligibility to include school performance.²⁵ This is a much-needed boost for seaside towns given their difficulties recruiting qualified staff, though it remains to be seen how great the charity’s impact will be.

Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders have also partnered with the Education Endowment Foundation and J.P. Morgan to pilot a new scheme called ‘Achieve Together’. It is a collaborative model of recruiting and developing high-potential individuals to turn around schools in areas of high deprivation. Currently being piloted in Bournemouth with five schools this model, if successful, could be spread across seaside towns.²⁶

The role of academies

Academy schools are non-profit, state-funded educational establishments that are independent of local authority supervision. Expanded by the Coalition government, they are seen as a way of improving educational outcomes by increasing school autonomy and leaving more room for entrepreneurial leadership and customised approaches.

While on a national level their impact has been difficult to evaluate, partly due to frequent changes to the programme during its existence, a recent study on the performance of academies in coastal towns and cities around the country – led by education experts at Plymouth University and the Cornwall College Group, and part-funded by the Academies Enterprise Trust – found them to be a force for positive change:

- The project tracked a cohort of Year 7 students as they moved into secondary education in the new coastal academies, all of which were located in areas characterised by high levels of poverty and limited employment prospects. A history of poor education had created an ‘anti-education’ attitude in many, while the secluded coastal locations brought additional challenges related to educational isolation and recruitment difficulties.
- Despite these challenges, the academies performed well in improving students’ outcomes: by 2012-2013, all six academies had met the Department for Education baseline for GCSE achievement, an improvement on their results pre-conversion. The report identified new principal appointments, an entrepreneurial leadership style, improvements in student learning culture and behaviour, investment in staff, participatory approaches, and a shared vision underpinned by clear targets and accountability as common policies that explain the academies’ success.²⁷

Policymakers should consider building on the example of these coastal academies and expanding them to other coastal towns – subject to periodical performance evaluations – in order to reap the educational benefits that their more entrepreneurial management styles can generate.

4. Making the most of broadband

Technology enables businesses outside of the tourism industry to set up and prosper in seaside towns. The UK now enjoys superfast broadband connections to 78% of properties, and the top average 3G and 4G mobile speeds in the world.²⁸ But even in our digital

age – in a country where people are spending nearly £45bn online each year – only 61% of small businesses have a website and only around 30% sell goods or services online.^{29 30} Additionally, 5.9m people in the UK have never been online, with even more lacking basic digital skills such as the ability to search for information or fill out an online form.

The reasons for poor connectivity vary. When poor infrastructure is to blame, government should get involved. One example of a broadband delivery programme in a coastal area is Superfast Cornwall. Funded by the EU, BT and Cornwall Council, Superfast Cornwall has built a fibre-based network that now covers 95% of premises, with nearly 90% able to connect with speeds of over 24Mbps.³¹ Research published by SERIO at Plymouth University and Buckman Associates found that connectivity has brought £186.1m of economic benefit to the area, and created or protected around 4500 jobs. Take-up has been relatively fast, with 67,000 businesses and homes in Cornwall already connected.³²

Businesses in Cornwall have reported a clear impact of broadband on how they operate and grow. Of those surveyed that had taken up superfast broadband, nearly half (49%) reported that it had helped their business to generate new sales and almost a quarter (24%) of that group pointed to exports as a driver. Average turnover rose by an estimated £90,848 per connected business, compared to just £20,922 amongst non-connected businesses over the last two financial years. 56% of respondents said that superfast broadband had “allowed the business to grow”.³³

While this is just one example of a successful broadband programme, the results are highly encouraging. This work should continue, and there should be a focus on relatively disconnected and deprived areas of the country, such as seaside towns, so that they are able to profit fully from the digital economy.

While subpar digital infrastructure can be to blame, this is not always the case. In Portrush, superfast broadband is available to over 96% of people, but take-up of any kind of fixed broadband service is only at 56%, one of the widest gaps in the country.³⁴ So getting the full economic and social impact of connectivity also requires better engagement from both individuals and businesses – but also investment in the skills and training necessary in enabling them to do so.

5. Building enterprising infrastructure

High quality infrastructure is essential in attracting investment and retaining businesses, and it is traditionally the state's role to provide this 'public good'.

Piers, promenades, shelters, parks, cultural venues, swimming pools, and cliff lifts are just a few examples of the unique infrastructure that can be essential to a seaside resort's economic activity. Information on the state of infrastructure in different seaside towns varies dramatically, and some researchers point out a lack of the systematic evidence needed to underpin an informed policy debate on this topic. Some towns are already served well by existing infrastructure, and should focus on maintaining it. But there are still clear cases in which seaside infrastructure is deeply in need of an upgrade.

The improvement in Scarborough's business prospects has much to do with public investments in transport, communications infrastructure and an award-winning state-of-the-art business park, which laid the foundations for a second wave of private investment in apartments, shops and leisure facilities.³⁵ In Arun (third in the UK for new business growth) £22m of investment in flood defences and the existence of the 'Arun Business Partnership' have helped improve local confidence.³⁶ Cornwall's highly successful 'Superfast' broadband upgrade relied on a combination of private, local government, and EU funding – a good example of how different sectors can work together productively. Local and national authorities should work with entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to identify where investment would provide the greatest returns.

The Coastal Communities Fund is a good example of a national venture to support infrastructure upgrades. Launched in 2012, the fund has already allocated £119m to 222 local infrastructure and economic projects around the UK, and has according to official estimates created approximately 13,700 jobs and 10,280 training places and apprenticeships. Off the back of this success, the 2015 Summer Budget extended the Fund to 2020 and provided it with £90m of new funding. The newly introduced Coastal Communities Teams – drawn from local businesses, councils and citizens – will hopefully allow local entrepreneurs to get more involved in determining how the fund is spent.³⁷

Seaside towns should emphasise transport links that already exist, but local authorities and national government should also be

looking for opportunities to upgrade when the projected economic benefits are large – for example by extending high-speed rail, as has been proposed for Hastings and Margate.

Local transport within seaside towns is equally important in enabling businesses, workers, consumers and visitors to connect with each other. The Coastal Communities Fund is funding transport upgrades within coastal areas across the UK. These include £1.5m worth of improvements to Bournemouth's rail and coach stations³⁸, and £1.3m that Dawlish is using to create a cycling and walking path that will link the town centre with the iconic Exe Estuary Trail tourist route – with the latter expected to raise visitor numbers and create over 35 local jobs.³⁹

6. Improving local data

Information provision is another important public good. Tech Nation – the detailed study of Britain's digital economy that found Bournemouth to be the country's fastest growing digital city – was carried out by Tech City UK, a quango funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.⁴⁰

This information on the current state of the UK's digital sector is invaluable in providing entrepreneurs with the data needed to make sound business decisions, while local authorities in those areas identified as weaker can use the research to address their shortcomings and strengthen their business offer. We should be doing our best to encourage more such mapping projects, for seaside towns and the broader UK economy.

There is also a clear need for seaside towns to have comprehensive inventories that would provide a public source of information on local assets for entrepreneurs looking for their next venture – such as the Moore brothers who are turning Hastings' derelict swimming baths into a state of the art skatepark.⁴¹ Local authorities should take the lead on this, as they are likely to own a large proportion of the underused assets in a particular place, and are best positioned to play the coordinating role of gathering the data.

The strategy proposed here is similar to that proposed by Dag Detter and Stefan Fölster in their recent book, *The Public Wealth of Nations*, which argues that governments sit on billions of pounds worth of public commercial assets, such as real estate, land and natural resources that are not used efficiently.⁴² But rather than advocating privatisation, they propose that governments maintain

ownership but allow assets to be managed as if they were private – undoubtedly an area in which entrepreneurs could get involved. Most if not all seaside towns sit on underused public assets – so we see no reason why this approach should not be applied to local government.

7. Devolving power

If local government can be effective in enabling entrepreneurial initiative, then one of the most effective ways to get seaside towns to prosper once again is to give them greater decision-making autonomy – after all, devolution is a hot topic. Because most seaside towns are small, they are at the bottom of the political food chain – the lower tier in two-tier local authorities. Yet seaside towns have unique characteristics and socioeconomic challenges for which they alone know the appropriate answers. For example, the success of Bournemouth can in part be put down to the unitary authority that makes the decisions there. This is in contrast to the end of line frustrations that have been highlighted in Hastings, Littlehampton and Scarborough amongst others.

While not a seaside town itself, the recent Cornwall devolution deal is instructive in terms of the powers that were granted to the unitary authority, such as greater control over transport, health/social care, investment and Local Enterprise Partnership management. These will allow Cornwall Council to make decisions regarding skills, education, infrastructure and local business better targeted (in comparison to centralised national decision-making) to the needs of its seaside towns. Blackpool South's Labour MP, Gordon

Marsden, recently argued in the Commons that “this government must tell us how their devolution plans will deliver not just for big cities but for the smaller towns and the seaside and coastal towns.”⁴³

As part of its own deal, Greater Manchester has been endowed with an elected mayor who will lead on local decision making. There should be consideration of the idea of mayors with real power for seaside towns that are big enough – mayors who can channel local concerns, interests and issues into policies that make a difference to entrepreneurs and their local communities. At the same time, we must be aware that the public might take some convincing – of the eleven cities that voted in the 2012 mayoral referendum, only two voted in favour of mayors⁴⁴, highlighting the skepticism of some that local mayors can make a difference. But this should not stop us from advocating the potential gains to be had from deepening local autonomy.

While we have provided examples of government enabling businesses, it can also act as a stifling force, as several of our case studies illustrate – a problem that is often magnified in small towns. Here, a few dozen votes can decide council elections, so that councillors become wary of using up voter support on risky schemes that might backfire and lose them the next election – understandable but frustrating for entrepreneurs who believe they have a great idea just waiting to be implemented. While it might be impossible to eliminate this incentive gap, we should constantly be reminding local authorities of the large contribution entrepreneurs can make to achieving their social and economic goals.

Case studies:

Meet the entrepreneurs

Getting to grips with the existing research and data that explains why seaside towns have been struggling, and advocating policies based on those findings, is only one side of the coin.

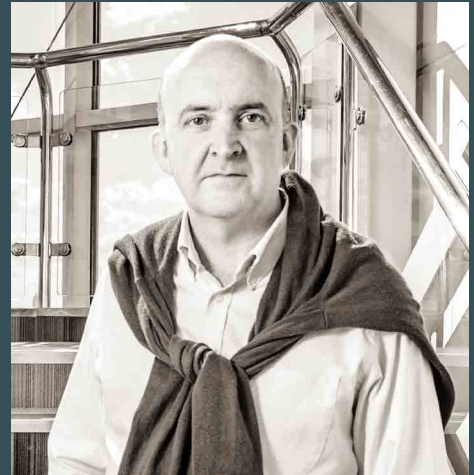
Equally important is an understanding of the on-the-ground, practical challenges that specific places face – challenges that general evaluations tend to miss.

This is especially true when considering the role of entrepreneurship in reviving seaside towns. For entrepreneurs are – by definition – highly unique individuals deeply embedded in the local settings where they implement their ideas.

So, if we want to make recommendations on how towns can unleash dormant entrepreneurialism, we need to combine broader socioeconomic analysis with the insight that personal engagement with individual entrepreneurs provides.

This is what the following case studies set out to do. We commissioned journalist and entrepreneurship expert Matthew Rock to visit different seaside towns across the country and seek out the creative businesspeople that are bringing change and dynamism to Britain's coasts.

Through his storytelling, we learn of the highs and lows, the joys and frustrations experienced by entrepreneurs in Hastings, Bournemouth, Scarborough, Littlehampton and Portrush. We also meet Wayne Hemingway, an innovator with roots on the coast who has been instrumental in the revival of both Margate and his hometown Morecambe.



Matthew Rock has been writing about entrepreneurs since the early 1990s. He was a co-founder and launch editor of Real Business, the UK's first magazine for entrepreneurs and still one of the UK's most popular SME websites. He's an ambassador for the British Library's Business & IP Centre and vice-chairman of the Women of the Future awards programme. He was co-author of the Centre for Entrepreneurs/DueDil 2014 report, Migrant Entrepreneurs: Building our Businesses, Creating our Jobs.

 @matthewrock



Hastings

The sporting and cultural entrepreneurs reviving a troubled town

Might a stupendous subterranean skate park be the catalyst to revive a troubled Sussex seaside resort? Building on existing infrastructure, entrepreneurs in Hastings are plotting a new entertainment and arts-led direction for the town once dubbed Costa del Dole.

Few towns have symbolised the plight of British seaside resorts like Hastings. While the Home Counties have prospered, the East Sussex town lagged in the socioeconomic indicators. According to the government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, it's the most deprived town in the south-east of England. Divorce, unemployment and teenage pregnancy rates are all above the national average.

In 1997, the town hit a low point when 14-year-old Billie-Jo Jenkins, who arrived in Hastings with her foster parents to escape a

dysfunctional home in London, was horribly murdered. The media dubbed Hastings "Smack City", "Costa del Dole" and "Britain's Suicide Capital".

But almost two decades on, there's also - whisper it - a hint of optimism in the air. But there's also - whisper it - a hint of optimism in the air. Thanks to a group of energetic entrepreneurs, a couple of far-sighted local officials, a clutch of free spirits, and a chance meeting between a young shop-owner and a local charity worker, Hastings may just be turning the corner.



Hastings Pier (July 2010)

David Kowitz, founder of Indus Capital, and his wife Sarah moved into an imposing manor house in the nearby Fairlight hills in 2002. They had not intended to become cultural patrons of the town, but were drawn in when the Hastings International Piano Competition (HIPCC) lost its long-term sponsor and found itself struggling for funds. Originally the Kowitzes agreed to put in £10,000 for two years, but Sarah became hooked.

"Hastings felt like a forgotten place," she says. "In terms of cultural life, it seemed to have lost its ambition." Neither she nor David describe themselves as entrepreneurs, but they do have an influential network and they know how to mobilise talent. Driven along by Sarah's energy, the HIPCC has been restored to former glories – it now draws world-class musical talent and is one of only eight sell-out events a year at Hastings' White Rock Theatre. Well-heeled folk from the Sussex hinterland are returning to Hastings for classical music nights as well as the Jerwood Gallery, which opened in 2012. In 2015, the Oscar-nominated film director Mike Figgis even spent several weeks in the town to make a documentary about the HIPCC.

The Kowitzes do not seek the limelight, and David took some persuading even to talk about his contribution, but they are just the kind of catalysts that such seaside towns need. One successful local entrepreneur describes them as "a high-achieving family who've thrown themselves into the Hastings community." Yes, their money is valuable, but just as important are their vision, can-do attitude, marketing nous and connections. David: "I come from an American east coast Jewish background. There, you're brought up to help your community, you all pitch in." Coastal resorts, he says, just can't afford to be defeatist; they are, quite literally, on the edge.

If Hastings' revival continues, it will in many ways be rediscovering an ingenious past. In 1923, John Logie Baird transmitted the first shadowy television images from a workshop at 21 Linton Crescent in the town; the first official

television broadcast was made three years later. The town is still a world centre for companies in ultra-high vacuum photonics and optics.

Raised in Bexhill, along the coast, Ian Casselden owns and runs five specialist manufacturing companies in the area, and employs 70 people in Hastings alone. The large manufacturing companies may have departed, but his Interface Devices is typical of the high-quality small and medium-sized companies that remain. For him, Hastings' biggest challenge – indeed the one that faces many remote communities – is that the skilled workforce is ageing and needs renewal, yet the local schools – many of which are in special measures – just aren't producing the talent required for the roles. The new Sussex Coast College, as well as the Brighton University spin-off specialising in digital and broadcast media, are the first baby steps on a long, hard road back. "Hastings just needs to aspire to bring itself up to the norm," says Casselden.

Will it, can it become a place where entrepreneurialism thrives? When the economic recovery began in 2011, the only East Sussex town that actually followed the national trend in new business formation rates was Hastings; the rest of the county couldn't keep up. Today, businesses in the town have markedly better survival rates than the national average: 45.3% survive longer than five years, versus 41% nationally. Meanwhile part-time working levels are high. Small signals, maybe, but perhaps the town's weather-beaten individualism is turning towards entrepreneurial endeavour.



Georgian and medieval
terraced houses, Hastings

CASE
STUDY

Marc and Rich Moore





In the summer of 2013, brothers Marc and Rich Moore were looking for new warehouse space for their booming bike and skateboard retailer, The Source. In The Royal Standard pub in Hastings Old Town, Marc bumped into Esther Brown from the White Rock Trust, a charity that manages the tatty though still elegant seafront area. Knowing that the trust had access to storage space, Marc started asking questions, particularly about the old swimming baths under the seafront promenade, which had lain empty and derelict for years. Marc and Rich had long thought it would make a great skate park.

The site, Esther explained, was a particular problem for the council; so much so that they were considering spending millions on gutting it. Marc knew straight away this was a once-in-a-lifetime moment. Within a week, he and Rich had visited the site, discovering that it was even better than they'd imagined: 50,000 glorious sq ft of subterranean Victoriana and art deco underneath the town's promenade.

Events moved fast, and the Moore brothers started putting together their proposal for the site's owners. Designs were drawn up, and references acquired from local business groups.

The brothers may be young – Marc was born in 1984, Rich in 1981 – but they've got plenty of supporters. And their creds in the BMX and skateboarding industry are awesome. They were brought up in Bexhill-on-Sea, whose Bexhill track makes it the unlikely home of British BMX and skateboarding. The boys were BMX fanatics from an early age. After school, Mark went on to become the world number three racer. Rich dabbled as an analyst at Exxon Mobil, before moving onto BMX magazine as a writer-photographer.

In 2003, they opened their own outlet in Bexhill. "We had so many product samples we'd been given for magazine reviews that we had to start a shop," smiles Rich.

Today The Source is based in an old church beneath a railway bridge on Hastings' Braybrooke Terrace. It's vaulted, atmospheric and slightly shabby. Really, it's the marketing shopfront for a very slick online retailer – sourcebmx.com and sourceskate.com – with around £2m of annual sales of BMX and skateboard kit. The two brothers also own a sister company that supplies 200-plus UK BMX shops, and have their own in-house BMX bike brand. Anyone who's anyone in skateboarding and BMX racing knows The Source.

At the beginning of 2015, after two years of planning and negotiating, their plans for converting the old White Rock Baths into The Source Park were finally signed off. It's a huge moment for Hastings. Work is now under way to create the largest subterranean skate park in the world – and the only serious one by the seaside.

The Source Park will have room for 600 standing spectators, who'll create an intense, close-up velodrome atmosphere at events; there's room for 3,000 more to watch on giant screens on the nearby Hastings Pier. There'll be retail space, coaching programmes for kids, and the Moores reckon they'll create 30 jobs in total and "re-establish a positive relationship between local young people and their local heritage." Early estimates suggest the park will bring £2.8m of new economic activity to Hastings. Farewell to coach tours; welcome a new, young audience who probably haven't visited the town before.

The Moores are planning to host at least one international-standard event per year at the site; and, again, because they know the sponsors and rock-star riders through their existing business, they stand every chance of making it happen. The equivalent Sipel Session event in Tallinn, Estonia, is a three-day spectacular that sells thousands of tickets, gets more than one million log-ins to the live feed, and hundreds of thousands more viewers for the YouTube clips. "The UK is crying out for something like this," says Rich. And critically, because the action takes place underground, it's not a seasonal business.

The project has been an impressive collaboration between Hastings District Council – it's secured £1m of European and Coastal Communities funding, as well as a loan against future rental income, to bring the derelict site back up to shell state – and the two entrepreneurs, backed by HSBC, who will fit it out and take a ten-year lease.



Victorian illustration of fishermen's houses in Hastings

How it'll go down with the local population remains to be seen. Hastings, like many seaside resorts, has a distinctive demographic profile: ageing, not ethnically mixed and usually resistant to change.

You find this writ large down on the Old Town's stony beach, home to the largest beach-launched fishing fleet in Britain. In the Middle Ages, fishermen here were granted the right to fish forever, for free. It's created friction to this day, says the local Fishermen's Protection Society. "It is a clash between a working community occupying a large section of valuable land – the Old Town beach – and the landowners, developers, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs and council officials controlling the affairs of Hastings in the last 200 years who have coveted that land."

Hastings was a crucible of workers' struggle in the Industrial Revolution. Robert Tressell's 1914 Socialist classic *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* – "Being the story of twelve months in Hell, told by one of the damned" – was set in the town and still sells well in the council's offices. Sadly, during the 20th century, ragged trousered defiance morphed into ragged trousered welfare dependency.

Edgy and alluring, people come to Hastings to do their own thing. Many artists and eccentrics have been drawn here by the light, the air, the atmospheric narrow streets, the radicalism. The illustrator Quentin Blake has long had a double-timbered house in the Old Town. Paula Yates, the tragic model-entertainer lived there, too. The controversial artist Dinos Chapman, brought up in Hastings, says it "figures quite a lot in my nightmares."

In recent years, they've been joined by many creative entrepreneurs. Craig Sams and Jo Fairley, co-founders of the Green & Black's chocolate brand, led the way, making their home in Hastings Old Town in 2001. Their award-winning Judges bakery acted as an anchor company, encouraging other creative and craft businesses to set up shop. Fairley, who'd also been a successful magazine editor, invited her media friends to visit. Most were smitten, writing glowing articles about the hip, gritty resort they'd "discovered"; some even relocated. Soon the town was littered with journalists and commentators talking up their own book. Little wonder that property prices today are soaring.

Summary

- Hastings is one of the most deprived towns in the country, and has had difficulty in reviving its economic prospects. But it may be turning the corner.
- Businesses in Hastings have better survival rates than the national average: 5.3% survive for more than five years, vs 4.1% nationally.
- Brothers Marc and Rich Moore took over Hastings' derelict swimming baths from the local council and are transforming them into a world-class skate park. The 'Source Park' will host international events, have room for hundreds of spectators, and is expected to bring in £2.8m of new economic activity to Hastings.
- Craig Sams and Jo Fairley, co-founders of the Green and Black's chocolate brand are based in Hastings', where their award-winning Judges bakery has encouraged other creative and craft businesses to set up. Media coverage of the town has spiked, and local property prices are soaring.
- David Kowitz, founder of Indus Capital, and his wife Sarah moved to nearby Fairlight Hills in 2002. When the Hastings International Piano Competition (HIPCC) lost its sponsor, the Kowitzes stepped in and restored the event to its former glories, drawing in world-class musical talent.
- A big challenge for Hastings is its ageing workforce and talent deficit. The new Sussex Coast College and a Brighton University spin-off specialising in digital media are promising – but small – steps toward improvement.





Bournemouth

From retirement capital to digital beach – the story of Britain’s fastest-growing tech hub

A new generation of ultra-digital, highly entrepreneurial creatives, developers and designers are emerging in Bournemouth. The city’s seaside-specific working culture is a crucial ingredient in enticing talent.

In early February 2015, at a slick launch attended by both Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne, the first ever detailed study of Britain’s digital industry was released.

“Tech Nation” had been a fiendishly complex project, drawing on multiple data sources and scraping the websites of more than one million UK companies to determine whether they met the definition of a ‘digital’ company.

One of the main purposes of the project was to identify clusters of digital expertise. The idea was that, armed with this insight, local government, planners, universities and inward-investors would be able to make better informed decisions about where to locate operations and deploy resources.

In quango land, there was much anticipation about Tech Nation. Local authorities fretted about whether their town or region would be highlighted. Would new clusters be identified, wondered the National Cluster Alliance. In the run-up to the General Election, the results might be nationally significant, reinforcing (potentially) the government’s core message that Britain’s economy had turned a corner and that it would be foolish to jeopardise the Conservative legacy.

So come launch day, the report attracted a great deal of media attention, and a lot of this centred around the identity of the fastest-growing digital region.

And the big winner, the fastest-growing, densest concentration of digital companies in Britain was, Tech Nation declared, in... Bournemouth.

Even in Bournemouth, jaws dropped in surprise. Locals knew that Bournemouth is Britain’s largest seaside conurbation, a place where affluent pensioners on generous final salary schemes have long since settled. But a tech hub?!

Among the town’s tech community, however, the accolade was no surprise. For some time, Bournemouth’s digerati and supporting cast had realised that something special was taking place. This close-knit group knew that the town was spawning top-quality companies – mainly agencies specialising in providing a range of digital services – and that these companies were growing in confidence and significance.

A few years earlier, while stuck at home over Christmas with young children, Matt Desmier had started mapping Bournemouth’s digital community. Desmier had formerly run the Enterprise Pavilion incubator at Arts University Bournemouth, assisting 75 new businesses during his time there. Now working as a freelance media adviser and counsel to startup companies, he was convinced there was a critical mass of tech companies that could start lobbying local government.

CASE STUDY

Matt Desmier



Desmier is like an exuberant bumble bee, buzzing usefully between ventures. And his instincts about the scale of Bournemouth's creative hub were right. Desmier discovered that there were 454 active, trading creative and digital agencies in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. Most operated in advertising, design, marketing and PR. Digging deeper, he worked out that, on average, each employed eight people - a higher than average headcount among digital agencies.

What Desmier unearthed, and Tech Nation later brought to national attention, was a south-west coastal agency culture, and one with deep roots: David Ford's Bright Blue Day, Andrew Henning's RedWeb, Emerge Group, RLA, the Walker Agency... some of Britain's most admired digital agencies were founded and still run out of Bournemouth.

Some of these agencies fed off other high-profile Bournemouth and Poole-born companies such as the luxury boat business Sunseeker, or Merlin Entertainments, or the retailer Lush; others grew on the back of financial services giants such as Barclays and J.P. Morgan, which have had large bases in the town for many years.

Bournemouth's agencies have been able to draw on a pipeline of talented graduates coming through Bournemouth's renowned Arts University Bournemouth, whose visionary principal Stuart Bartholomew has led it to become one of Britain's best universities for creative skills. Likewise, Bournemouth University's National Centre for Computer Animation has long been a world-class centre; and then there is Bournemouth & Poole College which provides apprentices to 2,000+ employers.

And today the legwork of those established local agencies and educational establishments is yielding rich fruit, with a new generation of ultra-digital, highly entrepreneurial creatives, developers and designers coming through to set up new ventures.

Marc Biles went to school on the Isle of Purbeck, the beautiful though misleadingly named peninsula that stretches from Poole Harbour on the east to Worbarrow Bay and the eerie deserted village of Tyneham to the west. As a child, he wanted to be a pop star and even had a crack at it as a teenager, before realising it would be easier to make a living in business.

In 2003, Biles joined the Richmond Group, the online loans company started by entrepreneur and future 'Secret Millionaire' James Bennamor. In ten years with Richmond, Biles helped launch 12 new companies that today have collective revenues of around £500m.

After launching the 13th, Ratio, Biles realised that it was time for the apprentice to become his own master, so in October 2013 he bought out Ratio from Bennamor's group and set out on his own.

Ratio, just up the road from Bournemouth's Aquarium, is a software company "dedicated to inventing smart products that help make people's lives better and easier." Biles, co-founder Tara Flynn and team have already created the choose-wisely.co.uk price comparison website, the "intent-marketing platform" remora.so and men's monthly underwear subscription club briefd.co.uk.


"In a seaside town, you have to work bloody hard to recruit anyone," says Biles. "There's probably a 50-60km radius that people are prepared to travel to come to work, and half of that is sea." He says that local companies will often fight it out for the relatively small group of 'A players' coming out of local universities and colleges. He has made a couple of hires from Poland and the Philippines, but reckons his business is still too small to recruit many people from overseas. Over time, and as Ratio diversifies into fields such as artificial intelligence, Biles believes it will become easier to attract high-calibre digital talent.

So for now, Ratio and other successful Bournemouth agencies lead on their working culture when trying to lure top talent. Their main message is that this is not London agency land where tiny flats, long hours and uncomfortable commutes are the norm. No, here on the balmy south coast, 9-5 is typical, as are barbecues and parties on the beach. When wind conditions are right, alarms start beeping in Bournemouth's agencies, and developers can morph into surfers.

**CASE
STUDY**

Tom Quay





Tom Quay faced such a challenge to recruit four top-notch developers that he put on his own conference, re:develop. “We thought, let’s put on the kind of event that we’d want to go to,” says Quay, a serious-minded young entrepreneur who came through the Enterprise Pavilion accelerator at Bournemouth & Poole College. His father ran a small firm of accountants in the Dorset market town of Blandford Forum, doing the books for local small businesses.

Quay’s business, Base, illustrates a growing confidence among Bournemouth’s digital entrepreneurs. Up until 2013, the agency was doing well providing digital services, mainly to advertising agencies who were outsourcing more and more work to him. But Quay wasn’t satisfied. “I started to wonder why, when we were doing such great work, we were so far down the food chain.” So he bravely ditched his major client and repositioned his business as a digital product studio that would fight for its own clients. “We have not looked back since,” smiles Quay.

As well as doing quality work, the company’s Westbourne office also houses the largest open device lab in the world – or, as Base’s project director Sam Westlake puts it, “the largest lab in the universe”. Here, testers and developers from anywhere in the world can come and test their latest apps and responsive websites for free on almost 500 devices. It’s another smart way of attracting talent – and potential clients – to town and to Base.

Right now, the tale you hear most in Bournemouth digital circles is about the tiny creative agency, Make Studio. In 2012 the agency, founded by Chris Bainbridge, snatched the account for the publicly quoted US company Garmin off M&C Saatchi in a blind pitch process. To make matters worse for their acclaimed London rival, Make was only a four-person agency at the time. Make has since

expanded its work for Garmin, the world leader in GPS technology with 2014 revenues of \$2.8bn. The whole episode breathed fire into the Bournemouth agency scene. There is a growing confidence that they really can compete with their big-city agency competitors.

Actually, it’s not just the town’s agencies that are buzzing. A new £60m Hilton hotel is under construction. Several Bournemouth University graduates were on stage at the 2015 Oscars, picking up an award for their visual effects work on the film *Interstellar*. Southampton University’s Professor Gerry Stoker says Bournemouth could become “the Greater Manchester of the South” were it to join up with Christchurch and Poole under one local authority.

A bewildering number of initiatives are under way in the area: Silicon Beach is a large, growing digital gathering and network; the BFX Visual Effects, Animation and Games Festival draws superstar tech and creative talent from around the world; the Arts by the Sea Festival also blends seaside and agency cultures. Local officials talked openly, albeit cautiously, about whether the town should build its own major film studio to compete against the likes of Shepperton and Pinewood. “Bournemouth is a collision point between digital and other sectors,” says David Ford, chief executive of Bright Blue Day.

The town has its own Internet Service Provider, C4L, which provides internet connections for many of Bournemouth's startups and established firms. The Bournemouth Community Finance initiative – “please don't call us ‘Bournemouth Bank’”, pleads senior account manager Ian Nance – is making loans to companies in the Bournemouth area that bring “economic benefit” to the borough. “There's a growing sense of unity, of purpose”, observes Base's Sam Westlake.

Many of the economic indicators are positive. According to the Centre for Cities, Bournemouth scores highly on patents granted (per head of population) and for its proportion of “knowledge-intensive” businesses. Calling it “Britain's San Francisco”, as one local cheerleader puts it, may be going a bit too far. But Bournemouth and Poole and the nearby Dorset coast have a lot going for them in this era of remote working and where work-life balance is a crucial ingredient in the talent enticement mix.

Tom Quay and Sam Westlake recently went to the South by Southwest film and technology festival in Austin, Texas. They loved it, and in particular were struck by how everyone in the city – from cabbies to baristas to waitresses – all talked up the town, repeating the same slogans and messages. “It was awesome” recalls Westlake, “it just becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Go on, Bournemouth, make it so!

Summary

- Tech Nation, a government-backed detailed study of Britain's digital industry, named Bournemouth as the fastest growing, densest concentration of digital companies in the country.
- The Centre for Cities scores Bournemouth highly on patents granted per head, and for its proportion of ‘knowledge-intensive’ businesses.
- Bournemouth's agencies have been able to draw on a pipeline of talented graduates coming through Bournemouth's renowned Arts University – one of Britain's best for creative skills. Bournemouth & Poole College runs the Enterprise Pavilion accelerator, which assists young start-ups, and it channels apprentices to employers.
- Nevertheless, companies still struggle to recruit, so Bournemouth's agencies use their unique working culture when trying to lure top talent – such as affordable living and a healthy work-life balance.
- Particularly inspiring is the story of Make, a tiny creative agency employing (at the time) 4 people that in 2012 outmanoeuvred London's M&C Saatchi to snatch the account for US GPS giant Garmin.
- Bournemouth has its own Internet Service Provider, C4L, which provides internet connections for many of Bournemouth's startups and established firms, and its own ‘Community Finance’ initiative, that makes loans to companies that economically benefit the borough.



Scarborough

Rebranding Britain's most traditional seaside resort

How can entrepreneurs ensure the seaside offers its resident population more than low skilled seasonal employment? Home to one of the fastest growing businesses in the North of England, talent is not only sticking around, but returning to Scarborough.

The train from York is jammed with excited children, asking, "Are we nearly there yet?". On the seafront, brightly coloured kiosks sell crab and chips. Children dare each other to run into the chilly water. Scarborough is in many ways the last bastion of traditional seaside holidays.

In much of Britain, they're a thing of the past; in Scarborough, they are still the town's bread and butter. The East Yorkshire town is consistently among the top five most popular destinations in the UK for domestic visitors. At the vast 413-room Grand Hotel on the seafront, rooms go from £29 a night, and occupancy rates hit an astonishing 90%.

Still, it's not exactly the glory days. Back in the 1960s, Cilla Black would play six-week seasons at the Futurist theatre in Scarborough's South Bay. Today, the Futurist is a 2,000-seat derelict eyesore.

"When the Police Federation conference came to town, it wasn't a case of how many beer barrels to get in, but how many we could fit in," laughs a former hotelier. Those five-day bookings for union congresses are a distant memory today.

Scarborough faces unique social and economic challenges, like many seaside resorts. The Barrowcliffe ward is one of the most deprived in Britain. In the cobbled old town, you can sometimes spot a pair of trainers hanging ominously from a lamppost, signalling that drugs are on sale nearby. The town's remoteness –

"42 miles from Britain down the A364", smiles local manufacturing boss Alan Pickering – has made it a place where some choose to disappear, often from gang life in northern inner cities.

But as a traditional town, it has traditional values that are serving it well. A few years back, the Scarborough community came together behind a successful bid to be named as Britain's – then Europe's – most enterprising town. In a manner that's missing in many resorts, local entrepreneurs and councillors work together for the greater good. There's a small army of local volunteers who maintain the town's handsome gardens now that publicly employed gardeners have been trimmed back in austerity cuts. And yes, this is a town where people maintain their front gardens. The sense of local pride is palpable.

Stuart McNiven's private office has the town's best views. Perched atop an 18th century toll house on the Scarborough seafront, the window to the right is filled by a fairground ferris wheel; to the left is the 2.5-mile Marine Drive, the Victorian promenade that skirts the Scarborough seafront. And 60 hazy miles straight out to sea, plans are in place for the world's largest wind farm, at Dogger Bank.

McNiven, 56, is a man of Scarborough and a man of the sea. After attending Graham Sea Training School, he left the town at 16 to see the world. His first voyage was aboard a large crew ship set for Iran. At 29, he became the youngest captain in the British merchant navy. He believes he's travelled to every country in the world.

**CASE
STUDY**

Stuart McNiven



McNiven is confident and very Yorkshire. It's easy to see how he rose to the top of the marine industry, latterly with the Danish shipping giant Maersk where he led a team of 1,200. Having built a personal network in every corner of the world, in 2006 he left the corporate world to become an entrepreneur.

The first few years were rough for his new company, Dalby Offshore, which started off as a ship manager managing large offshore vessels. The global financial crisis caused his then bank, HSBC, to pull out of his sector at 24 hours' notice. McNiven loses no opportunity to criticise the bank's behaviour, and states there were times when he almost packed it all in to focus instead on his farm, pub and upmarket holiday cottage businesses.

Then, on January 13, 2012, everything changed. McNiven's wife was watching Sky News when the news came through that the Italian cruise liner, Costa Concordia, had been wrecked off the southern coast of Italy. "You should come and watch this," she called out.

Over the next few days, events moved quickly. McNiven had done a lot of work in marine salvage and, though "never in a million years did I think our little company in Yorkshire would get the contract", he did happen to be close friends with Nick Sloane, the world's number one salvage master. When the news broke, Sloane rang McNiven from New Zealand. Plans, proposals, submissions were put together in double-quick time. And then the call came through and, McNiven recalls, "we realised, bloody 'ell, it looks like we've got the Costa Concordia."

For two-and-a-half years, Dalby Offshore was the main subcontractor for the salvage operation, putting 40,000 tons of concrete and 20,000 tons of steel under the stricken ship. The contract turned out to be a game changer for Dalby Offshore, perhaps worth tens of millions to the company. It was the biggest commercial diving project ever, setting a world record for the number of commercial dives. At one point, McNiven organised for a butcher friend in Whitby to ship 20 tons of meat a week to the hundreds of workers working on the operation. It's estimated that the total bill for the Costa Concordia's salvage will be £1.7bn.

"If you ever win one contract in your life, that's the one to win," says McNiven, with evident pride. Critically, the Costa Concordia gave Dalby Offshore, then still a young business, an international profile, boosted its turnover to £24m in 2013, and put McNiven at the centre of Scarborough's and Whitby's reinvention.

Dalby's next project is a £3m development at Endeavour Wharf in Whitby. From here the company will serve Dogger Bank (Captain Cook set sail from here to Australia), which will generate 200 new jobs for Dalby Offshore alone. Ultimately, some 3,000 wind turbines are planned for the colossal £30bn project, putting Whitby and Scarborough at the heart of Britain's renewable energy industry.

The challenge for this new industry and other local employers will be the long-standing brain drain from the Yorkshire coast. Many local schools are in poor shape; most of the clever kids leave Scarborough and do not come back. Which puts pressure on local companies when they want to recruit talented new people.

These acute skills shortages drove Alan Pickering, managing director of Unison ("intelligent tube technology") to such despair that he decided to tackle the problem himself. He has spent the past several years, heroically and ultimately successfully, lobbying and campaigning for the town to have a new university technical college (UTC). These new colleges blend academic and practical teaching within a curriculum that is partly set by local employers. When it opens in September 2016, Scarborough's UTC will be the only one in a town of this size. "It's got to work. If it doesn't, Scarborough will become a ghost town," says Pickering bluntly.

But there are reasons for optimism beyond Dogger Bank. Sirius Minerals has permission to start mining within the North Yorkshire National Park, which sits on two billion tonnes of potash (used in the making of fertiliser). Local officials reckon this could create hundreds of jobs.

As in many seaside resorts, outdoor sports and entertainment are flourishing in Scarborough. The Tour de Yorkshire, the successor to the county's phenomenally successful staging of the 2013 Tour de France opening leg, brought the world's top cyclists to the town. In Spring 2015 Scarborough hosted the P1 Powerboat festival, watched by thousands from the slopes above the sea, the town's natural amphitheatre. Surfing is popular, and Scarborough is home to one of England's most beautiful county cricket grounds. "It's a playground," says Tony Robinson, the renowned micro-business campaigner who has long made this his home.



The architectural fabric is impressive, too. Mighty Victorian villas fringe the imposing clifftops. Led by the quietly charismatic Nick Taylor, investment manager at Scarborough and Whitby Council, the town's 'super-output' problem areas have been tackled head on and, in instances such as Trafalgar Square, been turned around. Where once there were street drinking and 'chaotic families', now there are colourful hanging baskets and desirable properties. There's a £2.7m refurbishment under way in the old Market Hall, which could create 60 new jobs and a new hub for local craft businesses. 'Participatory planning' is a phrase you keep hearing.

Talent is beginning to stay in Scarborough and perhaps most important, is returning. Tony Robinson sees more and more successful executives leaving corporate careers in their forties and, like Stuart McNiven, coming back with a great address book, cash in the bank and a desire to help their home town.

Others use Scarborough in all but name. Local technology entrepreneur Andy Gambles keeps a postbox address in central London, but really works from here. And why not? 98% of his security software customers are overseas, and he only needs to meet them once or twice a year. "Sometimes they ask, 'where are you based?' I say 'Scarborough'. They say 'oh, is that near London?' And I say, 'yeah, it is'."

You can feel the buzz of home-grown talent in the Woodend 'creative workspace', an inventive £7m renovation of a Grade II-listed house in the town centre. Here, designers, artists, PR firms and creatives ply their trade. Why would we run a business from anywhere but this town of texture and sea breezes, many of the Woodend entrepreneurs wonder? It's not hard to see where they're coming from: the Stephen Joseph Theatre plays first-rate shows, Alan Ayckbourn lives in the town,

as do well-heeled former BBC types. Local poetry, jazz, literature and music festivals are proliferating.

Scarborough's future, like many remote communities, is delicately poised. If a large employer, like the frozen-food company McCains, which employs 1,000 people in the area, decided to leave, it would be catastrophic. No doubt there are enterprise zones across the north of England regularly on the phone to local Scarborough companies, tempting them away with rent-free periods and better transport links. "There's no reason for us to be here except that we come from here," says one local manufacturing boss.

"We have a recession every October," says Nick Taylor from the local council. Ancient local rivalries run deep, and can't help when pushing for regional investment and a higher profile on the national stage. "Scarborough people don't go to Whitby – and vice-versa," sighs a local businesswoman.

Still, while they've probably marred many a summer holiday, those North Sea gusts could herald a new future for this stretch of Yorkshire coast, adding a new, long-term industry to a charming, old-fashioned resort.

Summary

- Scarborough is consistently among the top five most popular UK destinations for domestic visitors. But it faces unique social and economic challenges, such as seasonal recession.
- Scarborough suffers from skill shortages and brain drain – many local schools are in poor shape, which makes recruitment difficult. A University Technical College (UTC) is opening next year to address this.
- A few years ago, the Scarborough community came together behind a successful bid to be named as Britain's most enterprising town.
- This was aided by the creation of the £7m Woodend 'creative workspace' where designers, artists, PR firms and creatives ply their trade.
- A £2.7m refurbishment is under way in the old Market Hall, which could create 60 new jobs and a new hub for local craft businesses.
- Stuart McNiven is a Scarborough native who left the corporate world to become an entrepreneur. In 2012 his new company, Dalby Offshore, won the contract to salvage the wreck of the Italian cruise liner Costa Concordia – a contract worth tens of millions.
- Dalby's next major project is a £3m development that will serve Dogger Bank, a wind farm worth £30bn that will put Scarborough and Whitby at the heart of Britain's renewable energy industry.
- Outdoor sports and entertainment are flourishing in Scarborough. The Tour de Yorkshire brought the world's top cyclists to the town, and in Spring 2015 Scarborough hosted the P1 Powerboat festival.



Littlehampton

The Heatherwick effect and a surprising architectural revolution

Sometimes, only outsiders can make things change. In recent years, the quintessentially English seaside resort of Littlehampton has been transformed into an architectural destination, thanks to one visionary entrepreneur.

It's a flat grey, blowy day in Littlehampton. Cars and vans tootle around the small West Sussex town. A few empty tennis courts separate white shuttered villas from the pebbled seafront.

Littlehampton has always been genteel. Like many English seaside towns, it enjoyed a heyday as a holiday resort in the early 20th century but then, as fashions changed, long-stay tourists moved away. Today, more than a third of the town's residents are over 60; 96% of this community is white. The Living in Littlehampton section of the town's website leads on 'Allotments'.

There are some patches of deprivation, especially around the River Arun where unemployment is high and the number of people with life-affecting health issues is, at 12.4%, well above the national average. But this is no seaside basket case, more a town dozing as the world races away. The renowned architectural writer Stephen Bayley described Littlehampton, with mild exasperation, as "this narcoleptic West Sussex town".

Go to any similar resort, and you'll find an emigre family – usually from the Mediterranean – running an excellent local ice cream shop or restaurant. In Weston-super-Mare, there's a large Greek community who own and run many seafront eateries. Maybe it's the sleepiness of such towns that appeals to outsiders. After the

upheaval of migration, perhaps they crave quiet and security.

And Littlehampton is no exception. In the 1950's an Italian family arrived that would make a lasting impact on the town. Their daughter was to become one of Britain's most influential businesswomen. She emboldened a generation of entrepreneur-activists – like Lush's Mark Constantine and Liz Weir, and Dale Vince of Ecotricity – who saw that business could be a way to effect social change.

As a child, Anita Perilli felt like an outsider in her home town. As a youth, she travelled the world, returning filled with moral outrage and business ideas. In 1976, as Anita Roddick, she opened her first Body Shop in Littlehampton; over the next 30 years the cosmetics retailer did more than any other company to bring natural products and environmental thinking into the mainstream.

When Roddick finally sold the retail group to L'Oreal for £652m, it had 700 shops around the world. Even today, Body Shop's HQ is Littlehampton's largest employer.

Before Dame Anita Roddick died tragically early in 2007, she had time to inspire a worthy successor in Littlehampton.

CASE STUDY

Jane Wood and
the East Beach Cafe



Jane Wood is a controversial entrepreneur-developer with her own protester backstory. As a youngster, she doorstepped an engineering company that would not pay her tailor-father for four suits. Later, as a toyshop entrepreneur in Wimbledon, she led local independent traders' successful campaign against the area's big landlord, the Prudential. The campaign banners featured the insurance giant's Prudence logo doctored with fangs, dripping blood and the caption, "Prudential, Up yer Rental".

Tiny, impeccable, usually in large dark sunglasses, Wood owned a second home in Littlehampton overlooking the seafront, the delightful view spoiled only by an "ugly concrete box" selling burgers. When in 2004 her daughter Sophie spotted that the kiosk was up for sale, they snapped it up, without much of an idea what they were going to do with it. For a year, mother and daughter ran the business much as it was, just adding white tablecloths and learning about the clientele. All the time, though, Jane's designer mind was whirring with possibility. "I couldn't think of one architectural solution," she says. "It's a very exposed position, so it couldn't be glass, and I didn't want pastiche, and how would it weather?" Nothing felt right.

Then, one evening at Goodwood Sculpture Park, she met Thomas Heatherwick. This was long before the designer's triumphant London 2012

Olympic cauldron. Back then, his best-known work was a pergola in Terence Conran's garden.

It was a meeting of minds. Jane: "I said to him, 'I've done this crazy thing and bought this beach kiosk in Littlehampton'. He said, 'I know it, I've been there, it's a beautiful beach and I bought an ice cream there'."

"Then he said, 'can I design your building?' and straight away I said, yes."

The result, the East Beach Cafe, is an outrageous sculpture-cum-building inspired by a piece of driftwood that Heatherwick picked up off the beach. Long and narrow, with a cavernous interior, it feels as if it craves the sea and, with giant, peristaltic steel gradations, is slowly crawling back to where it belongs. It is certainly not the kind of building you'd expect to find in Littlehampton.



The World's Longest Bench (Photo: Studio Weave)

The East Beach Cafe altered perceptions of the town utterly. No longer 'quintessential England', Littlehampton was now an architectural destination. Londoners and middle-class folk from the Sussex hinterland flocked to the town, intrigued by this extraordinary creature-building. Car park takings by the East Beach Cafe rose eightfold in the years after it opened. Vogue magazine named Littlehampton as Britain's "hippest" seaside resort in 2006; local officials still boast about that today.

There were no objections to the East Beach Cafe, but it did divide the town. "Marmite," says a local cabbie, somewhat predictably. "Some people love it, some people hate it. I love it."

Other wonders followed. Jane secured the rising star Asif Khan (the only British architect on the shortlist to design the Helsinki Guggenheim) to create her tiny, startling West Beach Cafe, its huge doors gaping onto the sand. With her daughter Sophie and Arun District Council, they conceived The Longest Bench, which weaves playfully along the seafront. Jane also dissuaded the council from restoring an old bandstand so instead they put up Stage by the Sea, two curvaceous white 'acoustic shells' that can be used as free performance platforms. And she built five John Pardey-designed houses on the Arun riverfront that blend maritime heritage and contemporary style.

This delightful stretch of coast was already architecturally important – nearby Sea Lane House is the only British building fully designed

by the Bauhaus master Marcel Breuer – but Jane Wood took it to a new level. Modest Littlehampton, the town so unassuming that it added 'Little' to its name to distinguish itself from nearby Southampton, was now home to several of the most celebrated pieces of seafront design in the world.

Soon, town planners from all over Britain were in touch, dreaming of their own 'Guggenheim effect' and begging Wood to roll out her magic in their town. It could have been the start of a triumphant procession along Britain's tatty resorts, yet Wood's energy has been sapped by bureaucracy and too many tiny obstacles. She's locked in a long battle over the lease to her West Beach Cafe, the local development control committee apparently more concerned by the cafe's toilets than the chance to drive the local economy. She's subject to persistent, nasty, local abuse. Jane Wood may be naturally unclubbable and disinclined to play politics, but you can't help sensing a missed opportunity about all this.

More astonishingly still, she recently had to abandon plans to bring another Thomas Heatherwick masterpiece to nearby Shoreham-on-Sea because the local authority there would not grant a long lease and insisted that the new restaurant have 12 toilets (yes, 12 toilets). "They don't realise how difficult it is to attract someone to take on these kind of developments," she says. "The footfall isn't consistent or high enough for the corporate chains; and individual entrepreneurs may not see the potential or have the finance to undertake this kind of development."



Littlehampton, West Sussex

Andreas Sparsis is another emigre-entrepreneur making waves in Littlehampton. His family was originally from Famagusta on the east coast of Cyprus, but was forced to leave after Turkey's 1974 invasion. His childhood memories are of tinkling goat bells, afternoon naps and family tables stacked with food. Hospitality is almost passive-aggressive in Mediterranean culture, explains the big, loud, hospitable Sparsis.

He started his Littlehampton Fish Factory restaurant in 2009, in the teeth of recession and against the advice of his accountant. The first year was a battle, but his Proto Restaurants have since grown into a £4.5 million-turnover group, with five outlets, in Littlehampton, Worthing and Brighton, and 110 full-time staff. Sparsis recently leased a 5m x 5m patch of beach from Worthing council to offer customers special, candlelit beach dining experiences. He's planning a food market — "Fortnum & Mason meets Moroccan bazaar" — in Worthing, where he also sits on the town's regeneration steering committee.

"I'm a man of the coast," says Sparsis. "In my internal compass, I can't move far from the sea; I get disorientated." For him, seaside businesses must trade in nostalgia. "All of us tell stories about places we ate in when we were on holiday by the sea."

Sparsis has been frustrated by smaller towns along the Sussex coast. "In Brighton, the local authority actively supports entrepreneurs, but here they actively block entrepreneurialism." His plans for a river festival in Littlehampton have been stymied by bureaucracy. He was infuriated that no senior council representative turned up to

the Fish Factory's opening. Arun District Council officials say they're "100%" behind local entrepreneurship. "We're not frightened by new," says Miriam Nicholls, business development manager in the council's economic development team. In 2014, the council oversaw a £22m refit of the town's flood defences, which has reintegrated the riverside's commercial and residential community. The Arun Business Partnership encourages local businesses to work together; there are town centre managers to support local retailers. Banksearch data on the rate of growth of new businesses puts Arun third out of 326 English districts, says Nicholls.

There are just 1,900 active local companies and, like many seaside resorts, this is a seasonal, fragile economy. Job numbers at the Body Shop are down on the 1990s peak, and its original shop and manufacturing base are no more.

Gary Smart understands the limitations of making a living in such a compact English town where the weather is the kingmaker but the sun doesn't always shine. The grandson of the famous circus showman, Billy Smart, Gary's family moved to Littlehampton in 1977 where they bought a small amusement park from the Butlin family.

Like all traditional circus families, the Smarts had to adapt — first from travelling to fixed circuses, then moving into amusement parks. Gary's spruce Harbour Park in Littlehampton is constantly evolving, introducing new rides, formats and games. There's a sepia picture on his office wall of him and Prince Charles swimming in a waterpark with a killer whale, as a reminder of how much fashions change.

Summary

- Littlehampton is an ageing, but generally well-off town. There are patches of deprivation where unemployment is high, and the number of people with life-affecting health issues is above average. The town's original shop and manufacturing base are no more.
- Yet Banksearch data on the rate of growth of new businesses puts Arun third out of 326 English districts.
- Jane Wood is an entrepreneur developer who, along with celebrated designer Thomas Heatherwick, transformed a burger shack into the 'East Beach Cafe,' an outrageous sculpture-cum-building that has attracted visitors from across the country.
- She also collaborated with rising British architect Asif Khan to create the West Beach Cafe, and designed the famous 'Longest Bench' with Arun District Council.
- Despite Wood's success in making Littlehampton an architectural destination, she complains of stifling bureaucracy from local authorities that have sapped her energy and led her to abandon plans for other works.
- Andreas Sparsis is another Littlehampton entrepreneur, originally from Cyprus, who has set up several successful food ventures but feels that Sussex towns actively block entrepreneurship.
- Yet Arun District Council insists it supports local entrepreneurship - the Arun Business Partnership encourages local businesses to work together, and there are town centre managers to support local retailers.

The pressures on the English tourism sector are intense. "The economic impact of cutting even one day off the summer holiday period is huge," says Smart. The imminent introduction of a new £1 coin will mean an expensive overhaul of his tuppence-pushers and games machines.

Though he is hardly an establishment figure, Smart started serving as a local councillor because he thought it was the best way to look after his business and the town's interests. It has meant many moments of frustration, including a notorious late-night council session spent arguing over a £40 bin. "I had young kids and was probably a bit sleep-deprived, so in the end I just yelled, 'I'll pay for the bloody bin myself!'"

In his poacher-turned-gamekeeper role, he's learned that local politicians operate in a different world to entrepreneurs. "They're not used to entrepreneurs with their energy and wanting to get things done straight away," he says. Confrontation isn't the answer. "You can't be on at them every few minutes."

What this town of extraordinary individual talents seems to need is a common purpose. Even the outsider-entrepreneurs recognise this. "We need to work together behind a central goal," says Andy Sparsis. Smart says that "entrepreneurs bring in new thinking, expertise and finance. We need to work together for the long-term local good."

As a long-stay resort, Littlehampton's fortunes have declined, and it probably won't see a return to its Victorian-era tourist peak. The town's ambition, "to be a holiday resort for the 21st century" is catchy though it'll be a stretch. But it does have natural seaside and architectural assets that give grounds for optimism. It's also a town of warmth and charm.

And in a relentless 24/7 world, towns such as Littlehampton reconnect us all to a deep yearning. "We all want to reclaim the innocence of childhood," says Gary Smart. "Littlehampton can take you there, even if it's just for a long weekend."



Portrush

The astonishing seaside family food empire

Entrepreneurial families in Portrush are building businesses and creating a legacy. Often returning home to the coast, their contribution draws in others attracted to the upturn in the town's fortunes.

In 2019, when the British Open tees off at Royal Portrush, on the northern tip of Northern Ireland, it'll be the first time since 1951 that the championship – one of golf's four 'majors' – is held outside the British mainland.

For years, the momentum has been gathering for the Open to return to the course. Two recent major winners – Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke (also Ryder Cup captain in 2016) – both hail from Portrush. In 2012, in a rehearsal for the British Open, a staggering 130,000 fans turned up to watch the Irish Open at Portrush's seaside 'links' course. When you drive into the town, you're met by a sign reading "Portrush: Golf's Major Capital" – a cheeky sign of the town's growing confidence and the reinvention that's under way.

The 'Portrush Olympics' are the culmination of a long-term transformation led, to a large degree, by an extraordinary and

unsung entrepreneurial family. While the chef Rick Stein and former wife Jill are synonymous with the revival of Padstow in Cornwall, for sheer longevity and scale of impact in a seaside town, surely no-one can match the McAlpins of Portrush.

Portrush was traditionally a place where people came for a Sunday bus trip and an ice cream. The town, and its three startling stretches of golden sand at West Strand, East Strand and White Rocks, were an escape from the harsh realities of life in the province, a refuge from the sectarian strife for which the province was known for nearly 30 years.

One thing Portrush wasn't was a culinary capital. But in 1980 a young couple returned to the town to open a restaurant and, as they say, the rest is Northern Ireland legend.



**CASE
STUDY**

Jane McAlpin



Jane McAlpin was born into the Caithness family, who were big in the local coal trade. Her husband, George, a driven working-class boy, hailed from Carrickfergus, home of Northern Ireland's textile industry and the Kilroot power station.

The McAlpins met, trained and fell in love at Portrush's catering college. After graduating, they left for London where they worked with the likes of the Roux brothers who were leading the revival of British cuisine. In particular, George was inspired by Richard Shepherd, one of the first British chefs ever to receive a Michelin star, and worked in Langans Brasserie.

Returning to Portrush in 1980 to start a family, the couple took over the Ramore bar from Jane's parents. They ran it first as a fine dining restaurant which, in itself, was a shock to the system in a provincial coastal town. Jane recalls "back then, people were accustomed to dine out in hotels and golf clubs, for sure they didn't eat in restaurants."

It was a success, but Northern Ireland had never seen anything like the little informal wine bar that the McAlpins also opened, on the floor below. People came from miles around, and still do, for its unique style and atmosphere.

The McAlpins had been inspired by Jimmy's, the restaurant/institution in Chelsea which, famously, didn't take bookings; to this day, you can't book ahead at the Ramore. Instead, long lines of customers queue along the harbourfront to get a table.

Inside, because customers go up to the bar to place their order, rather than waiting for waiters and waitresses to come to the table, there's movement, bustle, noise. It's as if you've chanced on a family party in full swing. There's so much going on, you barely notice the fabulous views out to the Irish Sea through the huge seafront windows.

Back to the 1980s, and the entrepreneurs' confidence began to grow. It soon became obvious that they had to flip the two formats around, bringing the wine bar to the larger space upstairs. A couple of years later, they acquired the classic seafront Harbour Bar two doors along, where they opened another bistro, introduced live entertainment and launched Northern Ireland's first gin bar. Next they revamped the Ramore itself, opening a cocktail bar, replacing the fine dining restaurant with a pizzeria, and created the upmarket Mermaid upstairs. In 2014, they got their hands on a bikers' pub opposite, which they revamped as the Asian-style Neptune and Prawn. Inexorably, over 35 years, they've built a family-owned food empire on the seafront of a charming, remote town.

It's a world away from restaurant chains, 'concept roll-outs' and that nagging suspicion you're being ripped off for an nondescript meal. In the whole Ramore group, the most expensive single dish on offer costs £15.95 for beautiful, giant, freshly caught turbot; the cheapest is the ludicrously priced £1.95 pizza.

The centrepiece is George's food: joyous, immoderate, democratic. This is food with a purpose; food for people who deserve to eat out, food bursting with colour, character and calories. The plates are laden and generous; meat is local and luscious. The 'side' salads stretch in ample portions along long rectangular plates, whole meals in themselves. Bang Bang chicken has been on the menu for 34 years, along with George's signature tobacco onions. There are no pretentious concoctions here, instead you get hot garlic and parmesan bread, peppered rump steak and big chips.

Most stunning of all are the desserts, arranged in a huge, multi-coloured glass-fronted display. The Ramore must be one of the few places on the British Isles to do a roaring trade in takeaway puddings! During the long years of the Troubles, Portrush was an oasis of harmony, where people departed talking about food, not politics.

Restaurants and wine bars come and go. The Ramore, however, hasn't skipped a beat in 35 years. According to the latest accounts, the Ramore group did £7.5m in the year to March 2014 and is forecasting a significant rise. The McAlpins have invested heavily in the fabric of the business in recent years. They employ 300 people, including 70 chefs, making them the biggest employer in the town by a mile. They haven't placed an advert in 35 years, yet on a busy summer serving, it won't be unusual for 1,000 customers to dine in the family of restaurants. On site, they have their own in-house butchery and bakery, servicing all the different restaurants. Behind the scenes, it feels like a cruise ship, a warren of highly drilled food expertise.

George and Jane are a well balanced pair. "He's the horse, Jane's the jockey," says a family friend. "George just wants to keep charging ahead with new ideas." He's the creative brain; his home is in the kitchen, adjusting, improving, training chefs and refining menus. He believes that people eat with their eyes, and owns a large collection of cookery books that he studies only for the pictures. He could doubtless have built a profile as a celebrity chef, but instead guards his privacy, not seeking congratulations or gratitude for what he's done for Portrush. And he's a man of few words; he doesn't respond to emails and only keeps a handful of contacts on his mobile phone. "Family, food and football, those are George's passions," says another friend.

Jane, a young 55-year-old, is front of house and in the back office. "I apply the handbrake occasionally," she laughs. She, her mother and grandmother were all born in a house within sight of the restaurant, and she knows everyone in the town. Jane, George and Christine Alexander, a local independent councillor, have led countless local regeneration projects. Together, they dreamed up "Paint Portrush", persuading local businesses and volunteers to give the whole town a lick of paint, street by street. George and Jane's two sons - Fionn and Matthew - are also in the business now; Fionn having worked with the renowned Irish chef Richard Corrigan in London, Matthew

having given up a professional golf career to return to the family company.

The McAlpins have had offers to sell out and to franchise the Ramore formula, but they've always turned them away. "It's a legacy now," says Jane. "Our ethos has always been to leave a bit of a legacy and provide employment. I feel proud for my town; it's had its troubles, but today it's a shining light on the end of this peninsula."

They have a commitment to the next generation, too. Led by former broadcaster and Portrush cheerleader Alan Simpson, they run regular "Recruitment Saturdays" when they try to identify kids with the right personality - not just the CV - for the Ramore. At the other end of the scale, many staff members have been with the business for decades. The Harbour Bar is run by the legendary Willy, a wired, tanned 50-something whose Thursday night behind-the-bar performances have all the energy of Freddie Mercury at his prime.

David Boyd recently returned home to the town after a hugely successful career in the music industry, during which he discovered bands like The Verve, Smashing Pumpkins and Placebo. Hut Records, which he started and ran, sold more than 40 million albums. Even he is awestruck by the McAlpins' contribution to the town: "George and Jane have had the most incredible positive impact on Portrush, more than anyone in the past century," he says.

Boyd is one of a growing number of accomplished people returning to Portrush, drawn by the upturn in the town's fortunes. He's already hatching a boutique beach music festival in the town (the McAlpins are doing the catering.) "Portrush drives you to leave, and drives you to come back," he reflects.

Chris and Ricky Martin are Portrush-born brothers who've recently come home to run their business. The boys left Portrush at 18 for the bright lights of Glasgow. Chris ran his own clothing label, before joining Ricky in Australia, for the surfing, and then moving home to run a company selling aloe vera drinks. It was "going sweet" until one of his wholesalers went bust, setting off a chain reaction. His bottler, alarmed by the turn of events, pulled the plug just before the peak 2013 summer season. "Within a month, through no fault of my own, everything fell apart," says Chris. "It was soul destroying. By the end of the summer, it was game over."

Unsure what to do next, he started helping fix his brother Ricky's battered surfboards. They discovered that the boards, manufactured in China, had fundamental design flaws – mainly because glue and salt water aren't a great combination. The young entrepreneurs sniffed an opportunity. "We just knew there must be a better way of making surfboards," says Chris. For the next three months, he spent all day, every day, learning about foams, sourcing hundreds of samples. Eventually, they cracked it.

Everything about the Skunkworks surfboard is different – the foam used for the core, the stability created by the red oak stringers inside the board and, crucially, the complete absence of glue; the boards also only use recyclable products from the UK. "My naivete made me find a way to bind the surface to the core without using adhesives," Chris says with obvious satisfaction. Supported by the local enterprise agency and with £50,000 seed funding, in the summer of 2015 the Martin brothers started testing "the world's most robust, most high-performance soft surfboards in the world".

To begin with, they will only make 50 a week at their workshop in Coleraine – "we need everything to be spot on because we're making such big claims". Marketing should not be a problem, however, because Ricky is a big-name surfer and has run his own surf school. The email has been alive with enquiries as rumours swirl around the surf industry. You sense that they are on the brink of something very big.

Right next to Royal Portrush golf course stands a large abandoned building project, one of the town's few flawed relics of Ireland's property boom. Soon, it will be replaced by a block of high-end apartments, designed for the American golfer market. And, in the run-up to the British Open, the town will be connected to Belfast by a new motorway. Life is not easy on the north coast of Northern Ireland: winters are long and the weather is unpredictable. But with golf, surfing, music and, of course, glorious food, you can see why locals call it Portmagic.

Summary

- Portrush was traditionally a classic seaside resort, and an escape from the sectarian strife that the province was known for.
- Portrush has been transformed over the years into a culinary capital by the McAlpin family. The couple came to the town in 1980 to open a fine-dining restaurant and wine-bar, and on the success of that venture eventually built a family-owned food empire, the Ramore group.
- The McAlpins employ 300 people, and on a busy evening serve up to 1000 customers. In 2013/14 the Ramore group brought in £7.5m, a figure projected to rise.
- Jane and George McAlpin and Christine Alexander, a local independent councillor, have led countless local regeneration projects, working with local business and volunteers. One example is Paint Portrush, which gave the whole town a new lick of paint.
- The family also run regular 'Recruitment Saturdays', where they try and identify young people with the right personalities for the Ramore.
- Chris and Ricky Martin are Portrush-born brothers that recently came home to run a business, 'Skunkworks', that produces surfboards in a completely new way. Thanks to their connections in the surfing industry and £50,000 seed funding, their business prospects look good.
- Portrush is experiencing other signs of a revival : new apartment blocks are being built to attract the golfer market; the town will soon be hosting the British Open; and a new motorway is being constructed to link it to Belfast.

Wayne Hemingway

Man of the sea, entrepreneur of the resort

Britain's coastline is an enchanting ribbon of land that we neglect at our peril. One entrepreneur explains that despite their unique social and economic challenges, seaside towns are also resilient and beautiful places, packed with character and allure.

In this age of data, it's pleasing to learn that the length of Britain's coastline defies precise definition. There are, literally, too many shifting sands, crumbling inlets, tidal ebbs and flows to settle on a final number. It's somewhere upwards of 11,500 miles, but to fix on a specific figure, you'd have to agree on what counts for land and sea amid tens of thousands of caves, outcrops and jetties.

One thing's for certain: the UK coast features some of our most magnificent and memorable landscapes, and it's home to many of our most intriguing, complex, remote, buffeted, eccentric and occasionally troubled communities.

And the UK coastline is often not knitted into the mainstream economy, making its communities dangerously susceptible to fringe politics and social discontent.

Wayne Hemingway was born in the Lancashire seaside resort of Morecambe. He is a successful entrepreneur who built, and sold, his own fashion label, Red or Dead. Since then, he has become one of the UK's best-known designers and commentators creating, among many projects, avant-garde beach 'pods' in Bournemouth. He lives on the West Sussex coast, near Chichester. He is a true man of the British seaside.

For Hemingway, Britain's coastline is "our crown jewel", an enchanting ribbon of land that we neglect at our peril.

Despite their social and economic challenges, Hemingway's view is that seaside resorts can actually draw strength from their demographics, their unique mixture of older, more conservative pensioners; the displaced and disenfranchised; and the eccentric creatives who have always been drawn to the sea.

His home town of Morecambe is a small community, pleasantly isolated from nearby conurbations. While it's hardly a thriving metropolis, there are flickers of optimism. A new £17m retail park is planned for an eyesore site in the town; there are mutterings of better road links to the nearby M6. And then there's Morecambe's natural environment, unspoilt, indeed carefully protected; and enclosed by a wealthy rural hinterland. "It could become another Abersoch," says Hemingway, referring to the posh North Wales seaside resort where the north-west smart set go to chill.

Different forces are at play in Margate, Kent, which spectacularly re-entered the mainstream in the summer of 2015 with the reopening of the Dreamland amusement park. The original Dreamland closed in 2003 and with it, it seemed, went Margate's fortunes. But thanks to a relentless public campaign against the site's proposed redevelopment as residential flats – and indeed Hemingway's own vision for its reincarnation – the town is on the brink of a new dawn.

The new Margate is a reimagination of the English resort. As the Guardian put it: "Once, Dreamland was at the cutting edge of fairground excitement. But now it has a whole other agenda: rather than competing with the high-tech thrills of Alton Towers and Thorpe Park, it offers a gentle, sweetly retro vision of seaside fun masterminded by designer Wayne Hemingway."

Hemingway believes that the presence of cultural destinations in Margate, such as the Turner Gallery, improved transport links to London and relatively affordable house prices, are drawing a new 'hipster' community to the town. In a similar way, Hemingway's Vintage by the Sea festival in Morecambe attracts 40,000-plus people to the Lancashire coast. (A notable consequence is that this younger generation also seems to reject the fringe politics that have seduced some seaside communities.) "It's the start of the journey that Brighton went through in the 1970s," says Hemingway.

Wayne Hemingway

Across the UK, tastes are changing, says Hemingway, and this is positive for seaside resorts. More and more people, for example, are taking up outdoor pursuits, and “you’re not going to go on a cycling holiday in Costa del Sol, are you?” He believes we’re becoming more cultured, too fidgety just to lie by the pool like the “Hawaiian Tropic generation”.

British people may no longer choose to go to Morecambe or Margate or Skegness or Weston-super-Mare for a two-week summer holiday, but they’ll visit for a short break if they know there are cultural attractions, nearby countryside and interesting places to visit.

Seaside resorts suffer from unique social and economic challenges, caused by remoteness, monochrome cultures and the disappearance of industry. But these are resilient and beautiful places, packed with character and allure. In many of them,

something is stirring, entrepreneurial energy is being unleashed. And if all you need to operate a successful business these days is a broadband connection and lots of determination, then Britain’s resorts may just have a sunny future. British people may no longer choose to go to Morecambe or Margate or Skegness or Weston-super-Mare for a two-week summer holiday, but they’ll visit for a short break if they know there are cultural attractions, nearby countryside and interesting places to visit.

Seaside resorts suffer from unique social and economic challenges, caused by remoteness, monochrome cultures and the disappearance of industry. But these are resilient and beautiful places, packed with character and allure. In many of them, something is stirring, entrepreneurial energy is being unleashed. And if all you need to operate a successful business these days is a broadband connection and lots of determination, then Britain’s resorts may just have a sunny future.

Conclusion

Yes, we should be concerned about many of our seaside towns, but we should be optimistic about their future. Changing lifestyle and business patterns – such as flexible working, increased leisure time and the digitisation of the economy – will make seaside towns more attractive to entrepreneurs. They, in turn, may find that a more relaxed pace of life, lower cost of living and ever improving transport links make seaside towns an excellent business location.



Seaside towns were once at the centre of British holiday life, first for the well to do and then for a wider public as industrialisation, urbanisation and the increasing affluence these generated created a new middle and working-class clientele with time and money to spend. They embodied the enterprising, entrepreneurial spirit of the era, with the success of many resorts underwritten by a range of private ventures in accommodation, restaurants, treatment and entertainment.

While seaside towns may not scale such heights again, the people we met and stories we heard challenge the established narrative of hopelessness, faded grandeur and economic torpor.

Scarborough's grand experiment in renewable energy promises to be a wellspring of economic opportunity for the whole region, while Hastings is rebranding itself as the home of culture and sport with its piano competitions, art galleries and art-deco skateparks.

Bournemouth is a proven success story, having been named the fastest-growing digital hub in Britain. Littlehampton has gone for a more offbeat approach, positioning itself as a town of quirky architecture. And then there is Portrush, which has transformed itself into Northern Ireland's food Mecca.

None of this would have happened if not for the creativity and willingness to take risks of the entrepreneurs in each town – which is why we insist that without entrepreneurs, there can be no economic recovery on Britain's coasts.

Entrepreneurs are sensitive to the needs and conditions of the places they work in – which is why our recommendations focus on maximising their impact. They need to be drawn to coastal towns and supported once they are there – which is why we want local authorities and national government to invest in achieving this.

We are confident that the vision presented in this report contains the ingredients that will ensure the future prosperity of our seaside towns – which we believe must remain central to the UK's heritage and identity.



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Government interventions in seaside towns

2005

A select committee inquiry to examine current government policy affecting English coastal towns is announced, and issues a call for evidence.

2006

The select committee inquiry into coastal towns receives evidence from 66 various stakeholders. They also visited several resorts and invited experts to a number of oral evidence sessions at Westminster.

2007

- The committee publishes its findings and a series of recommendations on a wide range of issues such as funding, demographics, deprivation, housing, climate change and national policy. It states there is a need for government departments to develop an understanding of the situation of coastal towns and work together to address the broad range of common challenges that these towns face.
- The government issues its first response to the committee. It is poorly received by those associated with the committee, which felt it failed to recognise what they saw as a necessity: specific measures to support coastal communities. They ask the government for a further, more considered response.⁴⁵
- The government issues a second response, accepting the following recommendations from the committee's publication⁴⁶:
 - o The need for further research on the challenges facing coastal communities, including the disproportionately high rise in the number of people claiming sickness and disability benefit in coastal towns in comparison to the average across Great Britain;
 - o The intention to establish a cross-departmental working group on issues affecting coastal towns;
 - o Establish a coastal areas network;
 - o Provide further information on seasonal employment in coastal areas.

2008

- The government sets up the cross-departmental Coastal Towns Working Group.
- England's Seaside Towns: A 'benchmarking' study is published, a report commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government to help inform policy development in response to the 2007 Select Committee inquiry into England's coastal towns.
- The Sea Change Programme, coordinated by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) begins. £38m is awarded throughout 2011 to local authorities to help with economic regeneration in a number of coastal areas through investment in culture and heritage.⁴⁷

2009

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announces the creation of 15 new coastal change pathfinder authorities. These coastal local authorities, are given £11m funding between them to help communities to adapt to coastal change. The programme was later evaluated, which included progress on how projects related to local amenities, future tourism and the wider economy.⁴⁸

2010

DCLG publishes Strategy for Seaside Success: Securing the future of seaside economies which includes a new seaside town grant initiative fund of £5m to help the most deprived seaside authorities and the extension the Sea Change Programme.⁴⁹

2012

£23.7m Coastal Communities Fund is launched. It is financed by the government from revenues from the Crown Estate's marine assets and delivered by the Big Lottery Fund. Successful applicants can receive a grant of between £50,000 and £2m.⁵⁰

2011

- The Office for National Statistics publishes the average data across 274 coastal communities alongside the averages for England and Wales on a range of areas including demographics, deprivation, employment, and more.
- England's Smaller Seaside Towns: A benchmarking study is published, another DCLG commission that serves as a direct counterpart to a benchmarking study of England's larger seaside towns, published in 2008.

2013

- Coastal Communities Fund increased by 5% (to £29m) and is extended until 2016.⁵¹
- Seaside towns to get an additional £16m cash boost for projects from the Coastal Communities Fund. Twenty projects in England will receive grants of up to £2.6m.⁵²

2014

Government announces £1.7m funding to help repair small ports and harbours across England damaged by winter storms. Twenty one communities receive funding which is in addition to the £200m already provided by the government to help fix roads, railways and coastal communities hit by the severe winter weather.⁵³

2015

- The government announces £36m government investment to boost growth in coastal areas through the Coastal Communities Fund.⁵⁴
- The government creates a £3m Coastal Revival Fund. This will provide small capital grants to help unlock the economic potential of hard-to-tackle buildings and secure the future of heritage and community assets in coastal areas. Examples of eligible sites and assets include seafronts and public squares, as well as piers, parks, promenades, lighthouses, lidos, marinas, military structures and so on. The fund is inviting bids from local communities, charities and councils of up to £50,000 per project.⁵⁵
- Twelve Coastal Communities Teams are announced as a pilot project. £10,000 for each team will be paid as a grant directly to a local authority, and teams can also bid for funding from the Coastal Revival Fund.⁵⁶
- Coastal Communities Fund is extended to 2020 with an additional £90m of government funding.⁵⁷
- The government provides more than £1m to fund 104 Coastal Community Teams, on top of 12 existing pilots. Teams can also bid for cash from the £3m Coastal Revival Fund.⁵⁸

This timeline is by no means exhaustive. There are countless community organisations, local authorities, networks and groups that have worked alongside government to make an impact on seaside towns.

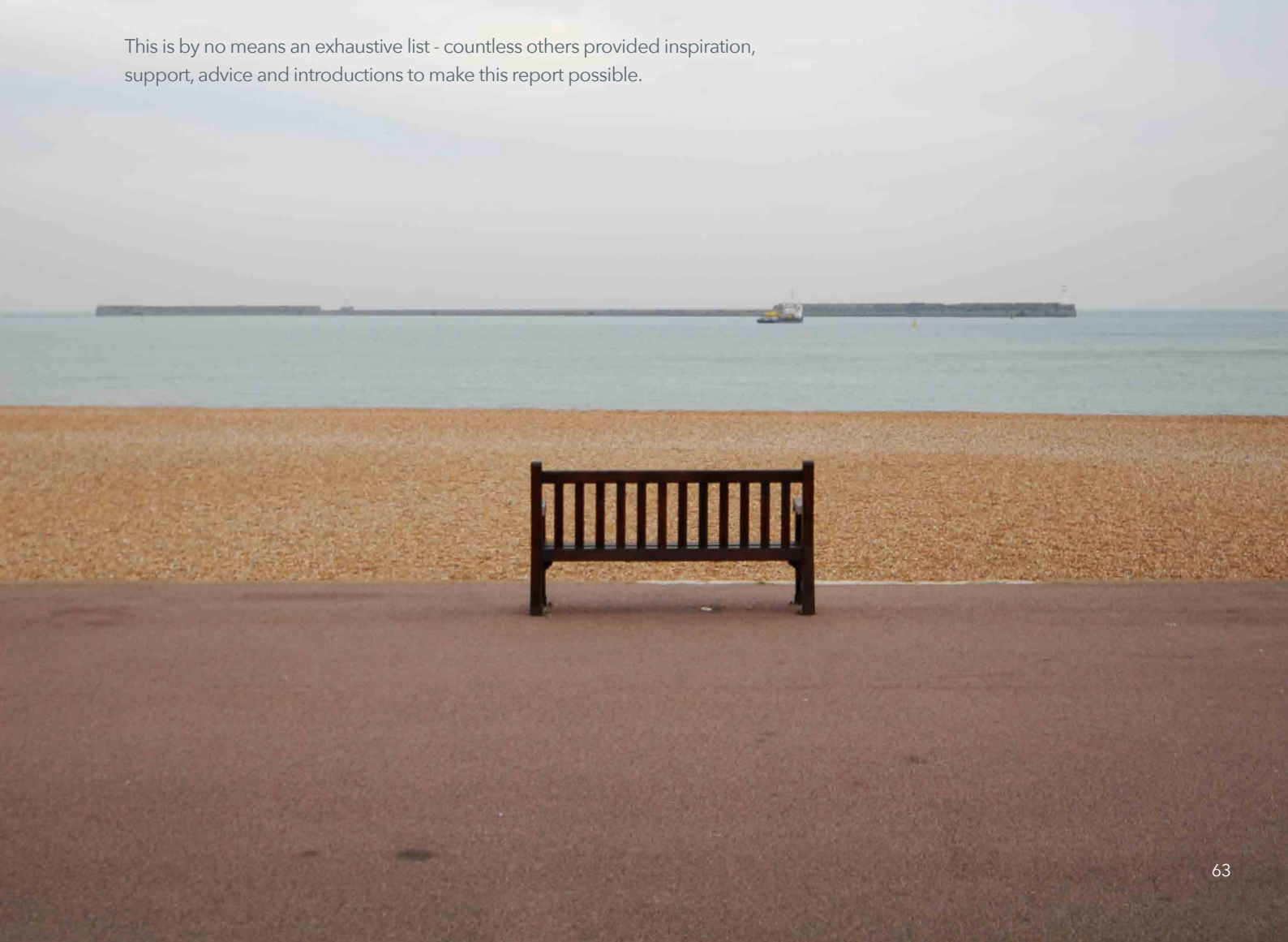
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