

Visioning Workshop Discussion Group: Place

Overview

A visioning workshop was held on Wednesday 30th April 10am – 2pm at Castle Green Hotel in Kendal to inform the development of the Westmorland and Furness Inclusive and Green Economic Growth Strategy. A series of thematic discussion groups – covering people, prosperity, place, green growth and inclusive growth - were ran as part of the session. This note captures the feedback gathered at the table focused on 'place'.

Focus of Discussion

All workshop participants were asked to spend 10-15 minutes at each thematic table. At the 'place' table they were asked to consider the following thematic opportunities and challenges which had been identified to date in the strategy's underpinning evidence base:

Table 1: Defining opportunities and challenges for the 'Place' theme

Five Defining Opportunities...	Five Defining Challenges...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale and profile of natural capital assets supporting positive image and profile, identity and pride, visitor and investment attraction, health and wellbeing, biodiversity and sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience and reliability of existing transport connections, with high levels of historic underinvestment, presenting a barrier to economic growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of strategic transport assets providing national connections to people and markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rurality as a barrier to access to services and economic opportunities, highlighting the importance of local connectivity and local service provision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key assets and major projects shaping and elevating the investment proposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Below average digital connectivity (ultrafast/gigabit capable and mobile)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of new housing to meet demand, including affordable homes and providing breadth of choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of acute deprivation in particular areas, including the living environment, housing and services, and health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths and assets to lever to support growth in clean energy, supporting the net zero agenda, energy security and providing a stimulus for economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant housing affordability challenges, particularly in Eden and South Lakeland, accentuated by the presence of second home ownership

Participants were asked if there any key opportunities or challenges which are not currently captured.

They were also asked to:

- Use the green sticky dots to identify opportunities and challenges which should be prioritised and captured within the strategic objectives for each theme
- Use the red sticky dots to identify any opportunities and challenges which are less of a priority (or less relevant)

This note captures the findings of the discussions within the 'place' group and begins to identify emerging priorities that should be captured in strategic objectives that will underpin the Strategy's strategic framework.

Table 2: Feedback on the Defining Opportunities for the Place Theme

Defining Opportunities	Level of Prioritisation	Notes
Scale and profile of natural capital assets supporting positive image and profile, identify and pride, visitor and investment attraction, health and wellbeing, biodiversity and sustainability	2 x green	Providing things to do to keep people wanting to live in the towns and settlements is seen as critical. Cultural offers were discussed constantly as a need. The theme of ‘not everyone wants to go walking and hiking, or sit by a lake’ and we need more to retain and attract people to add to these assets is key.
Presence of strategic transport assets providing national connection to people and markets	1x green 1 x red	While the assets are there in terms of West Coast Mainline and M6 the ‘getting to it’ from communities can be challenging – particularly if local rail doesn’t exist. Costs and availabilities of taxis were cited as problematic. Some challenge as to why the A66 is being dualled when we are trying to create a low carbon economy – need to consider non-vehicular modes going forward
Key assets and major projects shaping and elevating the investment proposition	Zero	Diversifying the offer away from just housing, education and working is seen as key – including access to such ‘cultural’ assets.
Delivery of new housing to meet demand, including affordable homes and breadth of choice	5 x green	The need to not just build ‘executive homes’ but to consider different types of house, tenure and focus towards attracting and retaining families was key. Some communities (Sedburgh was cited on several occasions) may be welcoming of modest volumes of extra homes if it can be targeted towards local needs.
Strengths and assets to level to support growth in clean energy, supporting the net zero agenda, energy security and providing stimulus for economic growth	3 x green	While people recognised these are important little discussion occurred on these specifically as stimuli for economic growth.

Defining Opportunities	Level of Prioritisation	Notes
Additional Opportunities Identified in discussion		
Climate Risk Assessment		Some discussion around the potential of ensuring that all change is linked to assessment of future risk – related to matters such as drainage, flood etc.
Voluntary sector		While funding has often been challenging recently using the voluntary sectors locally to help is underexplored

Table 3: Feedback on the Defining Challenges for the Place Theme

Defining Challenges	Level of Prioritisation	Notes
Resilience and reliability of existing transport connections, with high levels of historic underinvestment, presenting a barrier to economic growth.	9 x green	<p>Access to jobs in key locations such as Barrow – poor public transport from Rural areas for workers – particularly those on shifts.</p> <p>The network is seen as not reliable or robust. It was felt that some assets aren't being used effectively enough and that links between transport and health, and with seasonality need to be explored more.</p>
Rurality as a barrier to access to services and economic opportunities, highlighting the importance of local connectivity and local service provision	9 x green	<p>While there are a few towns with amenities and connectivity there are many 'next order' and 'lower order' settlements where simple opportunities to create hubs through planning (e.g. in relation to connectivity) could really help. Not all needs to be sophisticated solutions – rural bus links in South Lakeland being improved was seen as an opportunity to expand.</p> <p>Planning restrictions of the Lake District National Park designation was cited as a barrier to change – seen as very restrictive, despite recognition of the importance of protecting the natural environment.</p> <p>Lack of access to basic amenities – for example sports facilities is a key problem for older children and young adults – not just them but their families too as it influences travel patterns etc.</p>
Below average digital connectivity (ultrafast/gigabit capable and mobile)	5 x green	Digital is changing the way that people live and work – many are now working part time outside the area. This has pro's and cons.
High levels of acute deprivation in particular areas, including the living environment, housing and services, and health	2 x green	<p>Constant discussion about the need to provide better cultural and other assets – making places more than just places to dwell – links to challenges of transport.</p> <p>It was felt that even within larger communities the presence of sub-communities is apparent – isolation of certain groups is occurring and lack of community cohesiveness through amenities and places to inter-relate occurs.</p>

Defining Challenges	Level of Prioritisation	Notes
Significant housing affordability challenges, particularly in Eden and South Lakeland, accentuated by the presence of second home ownership	5 x green	A key theme was that the current housing stock is poor in relation not just to cost of purchase but the ability to heat, maintain etc. Much of the stock in the area is old and difficult to make sustainable via retrofit for a variety of reasons. Not just physical but also legislative issues create such barriers.
Additional Challenges Identified in discussion		
Agricultural Base		A key point made is that ultimately the area is a rural farming community and this shouldn't be forgotten in relation to its contribution to economy. With finite resources across the nation this area has that asset and it risks being forgotten in such a strategy by more urban/settlement focus.
Look outside the area too		A point made is that the area needs to inter-relate better with places on the periphery and outside – for example there is a growing trend towards green energy in Lancashire, while at the same time Barrow imports labour from there and beyond..

Wider Considerations

- Homes and places for people in mid and small size communities is key
- Creating amenities to recognise that people want more than just the 'lake district offering' to make them stay and work locally.

Emerging Priorities

- Creating more facilities across the range of places – creating cultural and 'living' amenities for people.
- Addressing transport and connectivity as a barrier, with appropriate often localised interventions rather than grand schemes.
- Creating a wider range of housing stock for all types of users and tenures not just what housebuilders want to build for most profit
- Addressing how to make existing stock more sustainable.