Seaside Towns: What matters to coastal communities and economies
Labour’s Policy Review
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Foreword

Britain’s seaside towns have a special place in our country’s history. They conjure up images of ice cream, fish and chips, games on the pier and paddling on our beaches. For generations they have been at the heart of our nation’s family holidays, from the chalk cliffs of Dover to the iconic Blackpool Tower.

Seaside towns play a key role in Britain’s tourist economy attracting visitors from abroad for the quintessential British seaside experience, and domestic tourists looking for a break or day out. Tourism is Britain’s fifth largest industry and accounts for 9 per cent of jobs. It supports 249,000 businesses and in 2012 total revenue gained from tourists reached £134 billion. This makes it a key driver for growth and jobs.

But the challenges facing our coastal economies are distinctive; they are towns and communities at the geographic periphery, often with a unique character and heritage to preserve. They are at the end of our country’s travel infrastructure, balancing new businesses and technologies whilst also retaining their tourist market. Seaside towns experience a high proportion of poor quality housing, converted from former guest houses and hotels, and they are facing some of the most difficult environmental issues in Britain today. In a post-industrial digital age, they can no longer rely on the low-cost-high-volume tourism that industrial Britain brought to their shores.

Today, these towns are in a strong position to benefit from the “staycation”, inbound tourism, low carbon businesses and economic regeneration; they can be a hub for entrepreneurship and are incubators of new creative business. But they need a government which will support them.

Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP
Shadow Secretary of State for DCMS

Dan Jarvis MBE MP
Shadow Culture Minister (with responsibility for Tourism)
Cultural regeneration for our seaside towns

Preserving the heritage of our seaside towns is essential if we are to continue to attract domestic and foreign visitors throughout the year. In government, Labour worked closely with the creative and cultural sector to regenerate our Seaside Towns.

Heritage Lottery Funding has also provided vital funding for English coastal resorts; during Labour’s time in government it provided over £391 million to 2,768 seaside projects, and since its inception in 1994, the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded over £27 million to regenerate 15 piers around the country.

Labour is considering how culture can be used as a force for regeneration in Seaside Towns. This means finding innovative ways in which local councils, businesses, The Heritage Lottery Fund and other partners can help create new cultural opportunities and partnerships whilst supporting existing historic infrastructure in the public realm.

Labour councils across the country are now looking at ways in which culture can stimulate sustainable growth to develop our coastal economies.
Seaside towns and tourism

Tourism has often been the staple industry in Seaside Towns. Nowadays, business and entrepreneurship is much more diverse but tourism still has an important role to play in coastal economies.

Since the economic downturn, the “staycation” has returned as a popular choice for Britons. Labour councils are working closely with the tourism industry to improve local marketing, destination management, regulation and transport. For example, some councils are working with local media outlets to ensure that local attractions and seaside towns are promoted as part of the local weather forecast and news in order to encourage people to explore the attractions on their own doorstep.

As part of the Policy Review, Labour is keen to explore how we can work proactively with the tourism industry to promote growth and support jobs in our seaside towns.

Labour councils in action:
Plymouth’s ‘Vital Spark’ Culture Strategy

Plymouth Council’s ‘Vital Spark’ Culture Strategy has put cultural regeneration at the heart of economic development by creating a culture board supported by Arts Council England and in partnership with Plymouth University. The plans will bring historic buildings in Royal Williams Yard into productive use to support the creative industries, and the conversion of boatsheds in Commercial Wharf will be developed to create a new artistic and specialist retail quarter. Plymouth used its City of Culture bid to display its unique culture and heritage and the council continues to expand upon an impressive events programme, including the Sail Fest, British Firework Championships and a new annual Maritime festival to attract more visitors to the area.
Living in our seaside towns

The residents of seaside towns are facing unique challenges. Life by the sea has, for generations, attracted retirees and second-homeowners to the coast. This in turn has contributed to rising house prices, making it harder for some working families to afford property in their home towns.

One of the consequences of this is that seaside towns have a higher proportion of poor quality housing, converted from former guest houses and hotels.

Chris Ruane, Labour MP for the Vale of Clwyd has identified this as a particular problem for seaside towns, including Rhyl in his own constituency:

“The number one issue in regard to housing is that for decades the buildings that used to be hotels, guest houses and bed and breakfasts in Rhyl have been turned into Houses of Multiple Occupation, which has had a knock-on effect on housing right across the county. Unfortunately these types of properties do not produce stable communities with many people living there for short periods and then moving on. We need to reduce the number of HMOs and convert these properties into proper decent living accommodation”.

The Tory-led government have made over 300 announcements on housing since 2010, and launched four affordable housing strategies. Despite this, rents are rising and house building has fallen.

Labour’s plans to regulate the process of landlords converting family homes into Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) have been distorted by the Tory-led Government, leaving local authorities in a weak position to take on rogue landlords.

Despite these challenging circumstances, many Labour councils have been showing that it is possible to make a difference.

Labour is keen to learn from local innovation in improving life in our Seaside Towns:

• We are looking at what can be done to protect tenants from rogue landlords, provide incentives to build affordable homes and prevent homelessness in seaside communities.

• We must consider how we can rejuvenate the high street, attract investment and use vacant shops so it becomes, once again, a bustling centre of any town.
• We are looking at ways to empower local communities so they can deal with loan sharks and betting shops. Placing betting shops into their own planning use class could give local authorities more power to stop them clustering on our High Streets. You can find out more about our approach in the Policy Review paper “Helping our High Streets: Empowering Local Communities”.

• We must consider ways to minimise anti-social behaviour and binge drinking if we are to capitalise on the many clubs, bars and takeaways which could provide the basis for a successful night time economy in many Seaside Towns.

**Labour councils in action:**
**South Shields’ 365 town centre vision**

South Shield’s ‘365 town centre vision’ sets out a bold plan to develop the high street and town centre in addition to its waterfront drawing on a mixture of private and public sector funding and expertise. It will build on its traditional market roots, maintaining the tradition of market days whilst creating an expanded retail and entertainment offer in other parts of the centre, linking its two waterfronts together, creating new opportunities for visitors, residents and businesses alike and revitalising its high street.

**Labour councils in action:**
**Blackpool’s selective licensing scheme**

Blackpool Council has implemented a Selective Licensing Scheme in some areas of the town to tackle anti social behaviour. This means that all landlords of privately rented properties in the given area will be required to apply for a licence which will contain a series of conditions that the licence holder will be required to comply with. These conditions relate to the management of the property, fire safety and anti-social behaviour. This makes it easier to regulate landlords and tenants in areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour, helping to hold landlords responsible for the residences they provide.
Creating Jobs in coastal economies

Our Seaside Towns are often hit by economic downturns as jobs are often low wage and seasonal, dependent on the amount of people visiting and spending in the local economy. This means that as well as unemployment being a major issue, under-employment – those that are working part time but would work full time – is also more acute in Seaside Towns.

Unemployment across Britain remains high and our Seaside Towns are some of the worst hit. According to a recent report, of the 20 neighbourhoods across the UK with the highest levels of unemployment, seven are in coastal towns.

Labour councils in action:
Great Yarmouth tackling seasonal unemployment

Great Yarmouth Council has been at the forefront of dealing with the problems associated with seasonal unemployment. The Supporting Seasonal Economy Programme has worked with over 520 local people in 2011 and 2012 to provide training to encourage all year round employment, helping to create a diverse and sustainable labour market. In addition the council, working alongside the preservation trust, has established an EU partnership to develop best practice and provide skills to train in traditional building. This will aid numerous heritage and conservation projects which will create new visitor attractions and preserve local historic sites and buildings, including the iconic glass and iron structured sea-front winter gardens, whilst giving local people valuable skills training.

An industrial strategy for our seasides

We will draw on the best examples of local innovation to invigorate the dominant employment sectors in seaside towns, and consider how opportunities for training and career progression can be provided. Most importantly, we need to think of ways in which new businesses in emerging sectors can be encouraged in these towns. This, along with nationwide schemes such as Labour’s Compulsory Jobs Guarantee, could diversify employment opportunities and offer real hope for job seekers in seaside towns.
The Adonis Growth Review is looking at exactly these issues and over the next few months Lord Adonis will be touring the country to hear the views of local businesses, colleges and communities, including in our seaside towns. The aim of Lord Adonis’ review is to set out a radical agenda for change to revitalise the British economy, by supporting business innovation and growth, and raising the quality and rate of job creation across the country.

Earlier this year, Labour MP Toby Perkins for Chesterfield, launched the Labour Councils Business Network, charged with encouraging councils to support the growth of local businesses in each region of England.

### Labour councils in action:
**Redcar and Cleveland’s Creative Hub**

Redcar and Cleveland Council have developed The Palace Hub to attract new creative businesses to the town. This has been part financed by the European Regional Development Fund North East Competitiveness Programme. The Palace Hub is situated on the seafront and provides contemporary office and studio space including pods for early start-ups; rent a desk facilities; meeting rooms and a dedicated business support programme helping to create 60 jobs and support 150 businesses. In addition it allows businesses based at The Palace Hub to display their work, attracting new visitors, customers and investment.

### UK Fisheries

Fishing is still an important element of many of Britain’s coastal economies. In government, Labour fought for fisheries reform in Europe to improve the sustainability of fish stocks.

A healthy sea and productive fish stocks are a prerequisite for a profitable fishing sector and thriving fishing communities. The Government has made good progress on reforming the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), supported by the British public through the Fish Fight campaign, to win allies in Europe on reducing discards and sustainable approaches to fish management. This is a once in a decade opportunity to transform the way we manage our fisheries and ensure we get the best deal for our seaside towns.
Labour believes that the CFP should support our small fishing fleets. Britain’s small fishing fleets employ 65 per cent of the workforce in the fishing industry, yet only have licences for 4 per cent of the fish quota. These fleets are the lifeblood of the economy in many coastal towns, like Hastings, Weymouth and Falmouth. The Government should take the lead in supporting our fishing communities and ensuring a fairer distribution of quota to these local fishing fleets.

Labour believe that the government should be working towards healthier oceans, better fish stocks and a sustainable livelihood for our coastal communities and fishing industry.

Increasing connectivity to our seaside towns

Seaside resorts are at ‘the end of the line’ in terms of the rail or road network, with only the sea beyond. This relative isolation means that these towns are dependent on a government which will encourage infrastructure development opportunities, and ensure that visitors are encouraged to travel.

Labour councils in action: Local Transport Development

Many Labour Councils have undertaken work to improve local transport infrastructure and increase access to visitor attractions. In 2012, Blackpool Council opened an upgraded tramway system which increases access to Blackpool town centre and some of the major attractions such as Blackpool Pleasure Beach, providing residents and visitors with an alternative transport option. In addition the Council have created the ‘Blackpool Bus Strategy’ to increase bus ridership and decrease car use to prevent congestion and environmental degradation. It is through initiatives like this that local areas can create sustainable transport infrastructure that increases visitors to the area and is convenient for residents.
**Broadband**

Delivering broadband access to seaside towns is essential for entrepreneurial and business growth in these communities. The Government scrapped Labour’s target of delivering universal broadband by the end of 2012. This has left 2 million families across the UK without access to basic broadband. Having dropped that target the Government is now also going to fail to deliver their own target of delivering superfast broadband to 90 per cent of households by 2015.

**Investing in coastal defences**

In government, Labour piloted new innovative approaches to coastal protection and management through the Coastal Change Pathfinder Scheme but this ended in 2011. The Tory-led government should be looking to build on that work and support coastal communities. Instead they are dragging their feet and leaving people to deal with the consequences.

**Marine conservation**

In 2009, the groundbreaking Marine and Coastal Access Act was passed by the Labour Government, establishing plans for the first UK ecological network of marine protected areas around our coastline.

The act established Marine Conservation Zones – national parks for the sea – to protect our marine habitats whilst allowing sustainable recreation and commercial activities to continue. Since then, progress has stalled.

In November 2011, a consultation process with industry and conservation experts recommended that 127 sites become Marine Conservation Zones by the end of 2012. The Government ignored this first consultation and launched a new process which will only see up to 31 sites proceed for designation.
Conclusion

Seaside Towns hold a special place in the hearts and memories of the British people. But Labour believes their unique position should not be confined to the past, but should be part of a bright, thriving and sustainable future.

Their distinctive heritage means that they should play a key role in the UK tourist strategy and in addition, they should be centres for creative, digital and off-shore industries, embracing the technology of the present and future.

This Tory-led Government is failing coastal economies. At the end of transport routes and often confined to a limited geographical space, their development requires a distinctive vision which embraces the challenges and opportunities they face.

Many seaside towns have suffered from the Government’s failure to deliver growth in the economy. This failure is apparent in the unemployment figures and deprivation statistics for these towns. Labour is looking at how we would do things differently. Dan Jarvis, Shadow Culture Minister and Gordon Marsden, Shadow Minister for Skills and Regional Growth, will work across the Shadow Cabinet to help develop an agenda that will work effectively for Britain’s Seaside Towns. We will consider the following areas:

- **How we can create an “English deal” – a commitment to local authorities in all parts of England that they will be given the opportunity to come together and take back power in the interests of communities.**

- **How local communities can become empowered to change the face of the local high street.**

- **How a new British Investment Bank would work with local regional banks, creating the jobs and growth our Seaside Towns desperately need.**

- **How we can take action against rogue landlords and extortionate fees in the private rented sector.**

- **We will look at new ways of working with existing partners including; Visit Britain, the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and Natural England to devise a strategy to increase visitor numbers in seaside towns.**