



**East Durham Trust**  
*Moving our community forward*

# **Seaham Agenda for Action**

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## **Background**

The concept of *Agendas for Action* for areas of the District of Easington emerged with the identification of a need to change the existing Neighbourhood Forums, in order to create a more effective way of engaging the local community. Although the Neighbourhood Forums had some success, only four were established and they did not adequately represent areas which were perceived as ‘neighbourhoods’.

Elected members attending Forums along with Council Officers agreed that, in order to harness the sense of place which people feel in individual neighbourhoods, it would be beneficial to divide the district into ten neighbourhoods-an approach previously adopted by the police- and to pilot three of these areas first with *Agenda for Action* meetings.

East Durham Trust was engaged in February 2008 to organise and facilitate the pilot meetings. The Trust, as a new organisation with an extremely strong community engagement record, was able to ensure a good level of attendance at the three meetings, and also to ensure that ‘new faces’ who had not been part of the Neighbourhood Forums came along.

A decision was made to use one small, one medium and one large neighbourhood for the three pilot meetings - South Hetton, Murton and Seaham. Taking inspiration from the recent DCLG publication *How to develop a local charter – A guide for Local Authorities*, the intention of each meeting was to draw up a charter to be referred to as a local *Agenda for Action*.

Meetings were arranged for 6pm – 8pm as follows:

Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March: Seaham; Parkside Community Centre

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March: Murton; The Glebe Centre

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March: South Hetton; The Robin Todd Centre

## **Venues**

The venues in Murton and South Hetton were the only feasible locations for the meetings, being the main or only community venues in those locations. The venue at Seaham was chosen as central locations including the Leisure centre were unavailable. However the spread of attendees and the take up of the offer of free transport at the event proved that holding the meeting in a less than central location did not present too much of a barrier.

## **Marketing and publicity**

The meetings were advertised using a variety of methods, as outlined below:

- **Press releases** – to Peterlee Mail, Sunderland Echo, Northern Echo etc
- **Mailshots** – a letter was sent to all previous Neighbourhood Forum attendees as well as all Parish/ Town councillors in the areas concerned.
- **Canvassing support from Trust members** – members of East Durham Trusts engagement team spoke to Trust members in each of the locations to secure their support and to ask them to pass on the word to others.
- **Advertising** – an ad was placed for two consecutive weeks in the Seaham and Houghton Star
- **Leafleting** – local community contacts in each location helped to spread the word by distributing leaflets to local contacts and by displaying a publicity poster in community venues/ pubs/ doctor's surgeries.

### **Format for the meetings**

People were asked to arrive at Parkside Community Centre for tea and coffee at 6.00pm, and were able to sit at any one of a number of tables around the room. An external facilitator gave an outline of how the event would work. Trust and DoE staff were on hand to facilitate and feed back when the group broke up into smaller groups to list their priorities. For ease of interpretation, participants were asked to put their priorities into one of six categories: Crime & Safety; Health; Work; Environment; Housing; People. They also had the option to create further categories if they wished. After the small groups had completed their task the external facilitator then summed up the feedback/ key priorities. The itinerary was:

- 6.00 Arrival
- 6.10 Malcolm Fallow: Introduction, welcome and purpose of the meeting
- 6.15 Facilitator: What we think we know about things to improve in Seaham / Murton / South Hetton now
- 6.35 Small groups: Ideas and areas where a real difference can be made in the next year
- 6.45 Collecting the ideas together and suggesting the top priorities
- 7.30 Sharing our views with the whole group
- 7.45 Facilitator: summing up, explaining how things will work, what will happen next and who to contact
- 8.00 Malcolm Fallow/ Facilitator: thanks to those who attended, close of meeting

### **Attendance**

At the Seaham event approximately 60 people attended and of these 31 left their contact details in order to be kept up to date with progress with the Agenda for Action. The age profile was fairly high but facilitators managed to get some input from young people attending a youth club in the same building. In terms of gender the audience was fairly evenly split. There was a significant presence from local councilors and community activists, but also a good deal of 'new faces'.

## **Outcomes – The Broader Statement**

In general the attendees naturally inclined towards focusing on the ‘big issues’ such as crime, anti-social behaviour, litter etc. The facilitators in each group had a challenge to keep bringing participants back to specific areas/ locations in order to produce an Agenda for Action which was meaningful and not full of broad statements like ‘tackle anti-social behaviour’. The main regeneration issues which emerged are summarised here, and the more specific Agenda for Action follows.

- More investment / infrastructure needed for leisure facilities
- Promote community cohesion
- Improve transport
- Improve police presence/ action
- Improve environment for the area
- Reduce worklessness and improve health/ health awareness
- Improve work and training opportunities
- Increase in affordable housing
- Build Community Spirit
- Build the capacity of the Voluntary Sector
- Give residents a sense of pride in where they live

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- **Consideration given to the feasibility of re-instating a swimming pool (pit pool site identified as a possibility)**
- **A more visible police presence and more action on youth drinking and drugs, particularly in Westlea/ Blagdon Road**
- **Action on dog fouling across Seaham**
- **Address dangerous parking across Seaham**
- **Improve job opportunities in Seaham (possibly linked to retail investment) and link training to real jobs which are available in the local area**
- **Work to strengthen local trade, and to promote the value of local shops/ businesses e.g. on Church Street**
- **Ensure more affordable housing by tackling the issue of private landlords, by ensuring adequate/ decent social housing stock, and by making houses greener.**