

# **Seaham Masterplan Update**



**Durham County Council**

**December 2016**

## **Context for Masterplan Update**

Masterplans are being developed for the majority of the main towns in County Durham. This document for Seaham provides an update to the 2012 Masterplan, showing what has been delivered across Council services in the recent past. The update also sets out key activities for the future in and around the town centre.

Key priorities:

- Improving the vitality and attractiveness of the town centre;
- New uses for vacant buildings and sites;
- Supporting the development of new housing and more jobs; and
- Further improvements to Seaham Marina.

## Seaham Profile

Seaham is a main town, situated in a coastal location to the North East of the County. The town is only four miles from Sunderland and also has excellent accessibility to the adjacent A19 corridor, a major economic transport corridor through the County serving the North East Region. The town therefore benefits from ready access to Tyne and Wear, to Tees Valley, to airports at Newcastle and Tees Valley and to the broader strategic transport network. Road access to east Durham, and also to Durham City is also good.

Seaham developed around its collieries and the coal industry. Following the closure of Seaham's last remaining colliery in 1992, the East Durham Task Force was established as a partnership between public, private and voluntary sectors. It aimed to address the significant environmental and economic problems associated with the decline of the coal industry, and channelled significant public sector investment into Seaham over a 15 year period. Major investment was made in road infrastructure, site assembly, land reclamation and environmental improvement. This has transformed the environment of the town and its attractiveness to private investors, supporting tourism, new retail development, housing and business space.

Seaham is a compact settlement, bordered by the coast to the east, the Tyne and Wear Green Belt to the north and the A19 to the west. The historic development of the settlement around collieries and the coal mining industry has led to the concentration of services and retailing along its coastal periphery. Consequently, some parts of the settlement, particularly to the west, are a significant walking distance from this retailing centre.

Retailing in the town centre was boosted by the development of a new shopping concourse at Byrons Place which includes an Asda supermarket. This was reinforced by a later development at the adjacent St John's Square which includes the Council's library and contact centre, along with a health centre. Dalton Park Factory Retail Outlet centre to the immediate west of Seaham, and on the opposite side of the A19, also serves some of the retail needs of the town. Dalton Park is situated on the site of a former colliery and cokeworks. Its reclamation for retail use created an attractive eastern gateway to the town.

The town has a population of around 22,000. Its population recently started to increase following a sustained period of population decline, primarily related to the decline of the coal industry. Population increase has been driven by the completion of a number of new housing schemes over recent years. The most notable is the completion of 600 houses at East Shore village. This followed significant pump priming and master planning by public agencies of this former colliery site.

Seaham now benefits from a very attractive coastal location. It is part of the 'heritage coast' which extends from Sunderland to Hartlepool, and is a main stopping point for those using the coastal path. Nearby areas of the coast are also part of a 'Special Protection Area', a European designation aimed at protecting rare and endangered birds. Significant investment has been made to improve the coastal environment of the town over a number of decades, including the 'Turning the Tide'

project which cleared the coastline of unsightly and polluting coal spoil. This was followed by comprehensive environmental improvements to the coastal promenade in Seaham. The North Dock was also brought back into public use, including the development of a 77 berth marina, with dockside business units. These major improvements are transforming the tourism potential of the town, attracting 3 million people in 2015 with a tourist spend of £115 million.

Seaham also benefitted from significant public sector investment from the Single Regeneration Budget with funding of over £5 million used to raise Seaham's educational attainment, improve community facilities, enhance the public realm and regenerate Parkside Housing Estate, in partnership with a private housebuilder.

Substantial regeneration aimed at supporting the economy of the town has also transformed the town's attractiveness to businesses, manufacturers and service providers. This has included:

- Construction of the A182 south of Seaham Link Road, a primary access route from the A19 intersection at the South of Seaham to the town centre, linking several key employment sites.
- Relocation of land based functions of Seaham Harbour Dock company site from the town centre to the south of the town with a new logistics facility and railhead.
- Creation of business parks and industrial sites at Seaham Grange and Foxcover which are now almost fully developed with a range of office, call centres, light industrial and business premises
- Reclamation of the former contaminated Hawthorn Colliery and Cokeworks to create a substantial new industrial estate/business park at Hawthorn, to the west of Seaham at the opposite side of the A19. More recently, the initial stage of a by-pass has been completed to link Hawthorn to the A19.

## What has been delivered?

### Housing

- Comprehensive environmental and coastal improvements in Seaham have made the town an attractive destination for housebuilders and buyers over the last decade. At the height of housebuilding, around 250 houses were being built in the town in a single year. In the last few years the rate of housebuilding has slowed, partly due to the recession and partly due to a limited number of sites currently being available for housebuilding.

### Business

- The North East Local Enterprise Partnership has identified Hawthorn Prestige Business Park at Murton within a second wave of Enterprise Zones which will become effective from April 2017. This site is exceptionally well placed to take advantage of the expansion of low carbon vehicle technologies being progressed in nearby Sunderland, along with meeting the needs of industrialists involved in manufacturing which need excellent access to Tyne and Wear, Tees Valley and broader access networks. The Council is in continuing discussions with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, with adjoining authorities and with business leaders to discuss and promote these issues.
- Business Durham aims to promote industrial sites and premises in the town to attract industrialists and service providers. In particular they have recently worked closely with Res Q, a customer contact firm that is about to occupy premises on Spectrum Business Park. The firm will create 1,200 jobs and this new business is one of County Durham's largest inward investments. It is understood that a major attraction for this Hull based firm was access to a large, high quality workforce. They work with the digital, energy, retail and insurance sector, also bringing back work that has previously been outsourced overseas.
- Business Durham also works closely with 'Great Annual Savings', a firm that moved onto Spectrum Business Park 15 months ago. This firm specialises in helping other firms reduce their running costs in areas like energy use, waste management and insurance. It is hoping to double the number of people it employs to 300 over the next year. In August 2016 the group was named as a finalist in the North East Apprenticeship of the Year Award.
- Recently and as a result of the success of Peterlee Business Park group, a Seaham Business Park group was launched in October 2016. Financial sponsorship has been secured from a number of local businesses, which will see it launch its own Seaham Business Park newsletter and website in January 2017.
- A range of initiatives has been delivered in Seaham to improve employability, employment levels and aid business. Since 2014 there has been an apprenticeship programme supporting the unemployed to move back into work by securing apprenticeship opportunities with local businesses which help to

develop their workforce as well as helping businesses to tackle skills gaps affecting their productivity. So far, the scheme has helped 44 people in Seaham to get back into work.

- The County Council has also led on a Targeted Buildings Improvements Programme in Seaham. This has provided funding to enable commercial buildings to be improved, or expanded, both to increase their commercial potential and enhance the street scene. Derelict and underused buildings are targeted in particular. From 2014, nine businesses have been supported using this funding, with 20 jobs created and two new businesses started. Premises benefitting from this funding were spread across South Terrace, North Terrace, Vane Terrace, Church Street and Tempest Road.

## Retailing

- The County Council has carried out a range of improvements in and around the town centre to improve the shopping environment and related access routes for residents and visitors to the town.
- The Council has funded a range of public realm improvements to the walkway linking the marina to the railway station, including upgrading of the 'Seaham Clock Site', and installation of new seating and litterbins.
- At St John's Square, disused land has been brought into use as a car park with 98 bays (10 disabled) to serve the shopping area and associated services. Adjacent land has also been redeveloped to create an accessible and attractive public square within the town centre with an attractive, accessible frontage to the Health Centre.
- Planning Permission was granted for further retail and leisure development at Dalton Park Retail Outlet Centre in 2012. The approved Morrisons store has now been completed but is currently unoccupied. The wider development including a cinema multiplex and associated food and drink units opened in September 2016.

## Tourism, Leisure and Recreation

- Seaham has benefitted from substantial improvements and investment over a prolonged period to its coastal environment, and the promenade, encompassing the creation of a marina in the Harbour area. This is attracting visitors and supporting continuing investment in tourist related businesses in and around Seaham.
- Seaham Hall Spa Hotel has recently benefitted from a £3 million refurbishment programme. The Hotel now features 20



suites, two restaurants (under the direction of a new Head Chef), 37 acres of grounds, and a 44,000 sq ft spa with indoor swimming pool. This Spa Hotel enjoys a national reputation which will be reinforced by this extensive refurbishment programme.

- Several events are held in the town including Seaham Fireworks, Seaham Carnival, and Low Tide Day.
- Seaham Marina has made a successful bid to the Coastal Communities Fund, recently receiving £1.7 million in funding. The funding will be used to improve facilities for berth holders, development of a marine activities centre, and to enhance the marina for the community and as a visitor attraction. The construction of the activity centre which is aimed at promoting kayaking, sailing and other water and land sports is already well underway. It is anticipated that the activity centre will be ready by early spring 2017.
- A nationally recognised sculpture known locally as 'Tommy' has been installed on Seaham Sea Front, marking the centenary of the start of the Great War. Created by local sculptor Ray Lonsdale, it is also intended to represent Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which affected many returning soldiers. Originally installed for three months on a temporary basis, the community raised £85,000 for its permanent retention. This was supported by major financial contributions from County Councillors in Seaham through their neighbourhood fund, managed by the East Durham Area Action Partnership. The sculpture has received substantial national and regional media coverage, helping to raise the profile of the town.
- As well as its coastal promenade, Seaham benefits from extensive areas of recreational open space. It also has a leisure centre which includes a sports hall, gym, indoor bowls hall, squash courts, sauna, multi-function space and outdoor pitches. The County Council's customer access point and library are now located in a modern building at the heart of the Town Centre, increasing their accessibility and attractiveness to local residents.
- A Sport England bid by Culture and Sport for the Watersports Centre has enabled additional development work to take place in communities, growing and supporting local watersports clubs.

## **Infrastructure**

- A range of transport improvements have been carried out, including safety measures to key roads, access improvements to the railway station, and footpath improvements. Additional car parking for around 100 cars has also been created in the Town Centre at St John's Square.
- Significant investment of £14 million has been made in a new Seaham School of Technology part of the priority school building programme. This school opened in September 2016. Investment has also been made in other classrooms and

extensions at Ropery Walk Primary School, St Mary Magdallen RC Primary School and Sea View Primary School.

## Area Action Partnership

Seaham falls within the East Durham Area Action Partnership Area. The AAP brings together local people, councillors and partners to set and address local priorities. Each partnership has a decision making board and an area budget. In 2015/16 this budget was used to support a range of projects.

- **Addressing Holiday Hunger:** The AAP made a number of grants to community groups in Seaham to support activities for children over the school holidays. Dawdon Youth and Community Centre, Deneside Action Group, Parkside and District Community Association, and Seaham and Eastlea Community Association provide holiday activities with help from this fund. These events also ensure that children receive nutritious food. Children and young people from low income families have been identified as being at particular risk of hunger as a result of the financial impact of school holidays.
- **Lumiere 2015:** The AAP funded contributions to three art installations which benefitted the community in Seaham. 'The Wave' was an art installation made from sea glass collected from the East Durham Coast. 'Electric Fireside' was aimed at providing a meeting place for those in the community suffering from social isolation. 'The Litre of Light' was created by school children, and was aimed at exploring the value of light in communities who have no electricity.
- **Financial Volunteering:** The AAP funds a 'Credit Union Project'. This is centred on working with the Credit Union to increase membership, service points, and engage with businesses to assist vulnerable people who find themselves in challenging financial circumstances.
- **Community Buildings Capital Project:** The Community buildings fund aims to support Community Centres in facilitating community activities. A number of small grant schemes have been progressed through the AAP in Seaham.
- **County Durham Apprenticeship Programme:** The project supports new apprenticeship opportunities in Seaham and across East Durham. It works with not for profit organisations with fewer than 50 employees that haven't recently recruited an apprentice, or may have never recruited an apprentice before.
- **Community Dementia Action:** This project provides dementia training to Community Centres in Seaham and across East Durham. This includes a community building audit, Train the Trainers training, and specialist activities training. There is also support for specialist sessions, including 'singing for the brain' in Stanley Street Church, and coffee mornings in ACES Internet Café, also a dementia information stand in Dalton Park.
- **Neighbourhood Budget Projects:** The 'neighbourhood budget' is a £20,000 allocation that each County Councillor receives to support local organisations. In



2015/16 County Councillors in Seaham supported a wide range of projects through this fund, including the Brass Festival Community Tour, signage for the Citizens Advice Bureau, Seaham Music Academy, support of youth football, a youth hub, Fun Fridays, EDAN Building Works, Dawdon Miners Banner, and 'The Clerke Lister Brain Haemorrhage Foundation Feel Good Project'.

## What will be delivered?

### Business

- The Council will continue to work with Business Durham, the development industry and companies in the low carbon/automotive sector to further expand research and manufacturing activity in the A19 corridor, including Hawthorn Prestige Business Park at Murton and the former Enterprise Zone sites in Seaham.

### Housing

- The Council and the Homes and Community Agency are currently progressing a joint venture in the town to enable the development of 450 houses on:
  - the former site of Seaham School of Technology;
  - the former colliery site, next to the new Seaham School of Technology, and
  - on cleared land adjacent to Malvern Crescent.
- The development of these sites will deliver new housing development to the west of the town, reclaiming derelict land and helping to provide a broader mix of housing to buy in this part of the settlement. A preferred developer has been selected and the Council is working with them to progress planning applications on these sites. Landscaped areas and a pedestrian route along the former railway are to be included in applications.

### Leisure

- Improvements to Seaham Marina will continue with £1.7 million funding from the Coastal Communities Fund. Works yet to commence include:
  - extension and addition of facilities to the boatyard;
  - extension of the pontoon system for an additional 19 boats and extra power modules to existing pontoons; and
  - the removal of the access road palisade fencing and gates to be replaced by sympathetically designed fences and gates.
- Seaham has a dryside leisure facility, shortly to receive enhanced gym/fitness provision, and has a range of activities for all ages.
- The Council is also funding design and survey work as a basis for a Stage 1 funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for part funding of the restoration of historic elements of North Dock in the Harbour Area. This would continue to

improve, and enhance, the tourist potential of the Harbour Area and the coastal frontage of the town.

## **Town centre**

- The Council is working with owners of a group of derelict and disused buildings on Railway Street. Buildings include the former Golden Lion pub, and the former Co-op. The Council intends, either through negotiation or acquisition, to ensure these buildings are demolished and replaced with commercial or residential uses which will enhance the street scene along with views to and from the coast.
- The Council will also shortly be progressing with Phase 2 of the Railway Street Boulevard Improvement Scheme. This will achieve continuing improvements to the public realm along Railway Street, including installation of new seating.

## **The Area Action Partnership**

The East Durham Area Action Partnership will continue to support its established projects in Seaham through its Area Action Budget. This includes:

- supporting community groups in providing holiday activities for children;
- supporting voluntary action related to the credit union project;
- supporting community centres in facilitating community activities;
- providing dementia training to community centres;
- establishing a new project jointly with the health, Mental Health and Wellbeing Group to assist those with mental health problems around unemployment, poor housing, private rent and social isolation; and
- supporting local organisations through projects benefitting from the neighbourhood fund, managed by County Councillors.