

## **Susannah Bleakley's presentation to the Regional Parks Meeting at the Midland Hotel on 17 Oct 2008.**

### **Report on status and progress of the Morecambe Bay and Duddon Regional Park Proposal, including a review of the Genecon report.**

Thank you to everyone here for making the time to come along today, I'm very pleased to see so many people.

#### **Eric Gill Map**

The proposal for a regional park around Morecambe Bay and the Duddon is still at an early stage of development. The geographical extent encompasses all of the Duddon estuary and Morecambe Bay – from Haverigg to Fleetwood, though no formal boundaries have yet been fixed.

At present the Morecambe Bay Partnership, with grant support from the Regional Parks Exchange is taking the work forward. The Partnership is acting as secretariat to an informal grouping of local authorities and agencies, and a smaller core group.

#### **Building on...**

Although the concept of a Regional Park for this area has been around for at least 5 years it hadn't been explored in any detail until just the last few months, when 3 short studies have been done.

I shall say a little more about the first of these - the Genecon study. Sue will talk about the work from Liverpool University and Kate about the most recent Expert group work.

#### **Background**

In 2006, the Regional Economic Strategy included Morecambe Bay as a potential Regional Park to be further developed. However, it was only in November last year that the first meeting of local authorities and other relevant

agencies was held to look into this. The meeting supported the concept, and agreed to begin scoping work. Since then these 3 short studies have moved the concept forward.

So after a long wait, we have the excitement of 3 coming along at once. But just before looking at the reports I'd like us to remember what it is we are talking about which is

**The Bay** – the coastal areas of Morecambe Bay and the Duddon.

Glorious places, big and beautiful. Morecambe Bay itself is large enough for all of Manchester within the M60 to fit inside at least twice. This size and scale gives it a grandeur and sense of open-ness and wide open spaces. Much of the NW coast to the south is low-lying, but Morecambe Bay has headlands and hill top viewpoints to appreciate the vast panoramas.

**The views across the Duddon** and Morecambe Bay from whichever side you look, has a foreground of the changing channels of the inter-tidal with a backdrop of hills whether the Lake District fells or the Pennines. And it's the views that local people value most.

**The shifting channels** and ebb and flow of the tides give us a constantly changing canvas as the backdrop to our lives. The whole place has a sense of wilderness and wildness, - and the grand scale gives head space good to have and relaxing to the soul; it is a place to unwind and regroup.

The intertidal area of the Bay is larger than anywhere else in Britain and this vast intertidal gives us features that are special or unique.

It gives us our Cross Bay walks - incredibly popular as a fund-raising activity. It means there are **unusual 'intertidal' traditional fishing** and the intertidal provides the feeding grounds for internationally important numbers of birds.

The cockling tragedy of 2004 had a negative impact on the image of the Bay – to many people outside the region the Bay is associated with the death of Chinese cocklers.

**Cross Bay walks** are hugely popular, over 10,000 people walk across the Bay each year for charity. Around 800 walkers took part on just one Saturday in June, yet the facilities for walkers are poor.

The **railway line** runs around the north and east of the coast, yet some of the gateways are poor. There is a Coastal Trail - Cumbrian coastal way, Lancashire coastal way, Cistercian way – but none currently promoted, signage poor in places and the maintenance budgets inadequate.

There is a recurring theme of great assets undersold.

Something in the human condition that draws one to the coast – this area has many great places for informal recreation, but certainly needs to lift it's game – facilities are patchy and the assets are undersold.

### **Genecon report**

I think most of you will have seen this report, we've sent it out by email and it is available as a download from our website. Bruce Bendell of Genecon who did much of the work is here today and is happy to discuss.

Genecon completed their study between Feb and April this year. Our thanks to Bruce and to Genecon for kick-starting the current interest in the regional park and moving the concept on. Their study followed a logical process of

- desk studies
- meetings, with > 20 stakeholders contributing
- developing themes and a project list
- advising on governance & delivery
- preparing the final report

**Their Brief** was to explore the Regional Park concept to see if it made sense for the area.

They sets two tests for whether a regional park would be of benefit

- (i) whether better collaboration between authorities across the Bay might be a useful addition to locally-focused activity, unlocking investment and
- (ii) whether beneficial projects might therefore be delivered which may otherwise be unlikely to succeed.

The study concludes that a regional park would satisfy both tests.

### **Consultation main messages (1)**

There were

- mixed levels of understanding of the concept –but broad support for moving ahead;
- a strong appreciation of the strength of the natural environment.

On the down-side there was

- concern that resources, already tight, would be too stretched and there was little prospect of significant additional resources for this
- concern over the relative strength of the Bay as a 'brand' compared to other tourist destinations in the area and that any funding available might be better spent promoting these.

Many consultees commented that cross-authority working was currently weak around the Bay, and that a regional park would be a valuable aid to better collaboration.

### **Consultation main messages (2)**

There was

- limited willingness to put resources in at this stage and
- recognition of the need to mainstream the concept in sub-regional strategies

Regarding tourism

- facilities and quality was seen as patchy
- yet there are some great places.

### **Baseline**

- a strong appreciation of the natural environment;
- strong and diverse communities
- opportunity to expand visitor offer
- rail access

There are a number of challenges to overcome, yet most consultees see the regional park as a useful way of promoting sustainable development, including tourism benefits from connecting green infrastructure, and marketing and building a network of green sites.

### **Baseline jobs**

The report recognises the importance of tourism and recreation jobs and suggests that a regional park might deliver a 10%-25% increase in the number of jobs in these two sectors. Giving a GVA increase in the 5 local authorities of between £45-113 million pa.

### **Baseline - importance of visitors**

The report suggests that challenge for Lancashire is to raise the average visitor spend to be more in line with Cumbrian levels.

And sees the challenge for Cumbria to improve Barrow's and Copeland's tourism infrastructure to lengthen stays and raise spend.

### **5 estuaries**

The study looks at the characteristics of the five estuarial areas of Morecambe Bay, identifying strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

### **Lune example**

## **Themes**

It then goes on to take a cross-Bay view around common themes of environment, tourism, working, access and living.

## **Natural example**

**Over 40 Projects** are identified, and **six 'early wins'** highlighted – these were seen as being achievable relatively quickly, projects which make more sense as part of a bigger scheme and which would, both benefit from, and contribute to, a regional park.

## **Potential projects**

The area already supports a wide range of recreational activities including water-sports, and walking. It's felt that by looking at the area as a whole and developing a spatial plan, perhaps with an overarching visitor management strategy, the potential for further informal recreation and broadening of the tourism offer could be realised. However, this needs to be sensitively managed to avoid damaging the natural environment. Equally though, it's possible that through the development of an overarching visitor management plan that potential new visitor destinations may emerge.

Projects to improve access, and facilities could allow a better appreciation of the environment and still bring more visitors within the limits of acceptable change. Improved access, information and visitor facilities have been talked about for the Islands of Barrow and Hodbarrow lagoon, near Haverigg.

The creation of a pedestrian and cycle path over Arnside viaduct has been discussed. Connectivity could be further improved at railway gateways to ensure high quality, integrated, green-transport links.

The Liverpool University and Expert group reports suggest further projects. Credibility will come from doing things - delivering projects, but first we need to have more consultation and work together as stakeholders

- to cherry pick projects from those offered and
- to build a shared vision.

### **Shadow Governance**

To take this forward we propose a shadow governance model which includes

- a wider stakeholder group of 20-30 organisations, including local authorities, other relevant bodies and a
- smaller programme board of around 8-10 key individuals
- With the Morecambe Bay Partnership acting as secretariat to the both these groups.

Through consultation, and working together agreement could be reached on a programme of activities with the delivery of individual projects handled by the body most appropriate.

For delivery of some of the activities, such as communications and consultation work, this may be programme board with the Morecambe Bay Partnership.

For major infrastructure works it is likely to be local authorities and other bodies such as Westlakes Renaissance who have responsibility for delivery.

At some point, if the programme progresses well, then, we should aim to adjust any shadow structure and formalise the management structure. Ideally in the long term, we would look to get one body to take on responsibility for delivery and demonstrate the collective nature of the initiative.

### **Moving forward**

We have been awarded a small grant from the Regional Parks Exchange for work over the next few months including a further consultation and advice on communications.

We plan to hold a conference at the end of January 2009 exploring the regional park concept. This will be the Morecambe Bay Partnership's Annual Conference and will be open to a wide audience. It may include workshops.

We will work with external consultants on communication –

- to prepare a brochure or prospectus
- we are keen to drop the word 'park' because it causes confusion so we need a new name

### **Big Opportunity**

Improving the image of the area could help to encourage more business start-ups providing high quality jobs attracted by a high quality of life.

Improving access, information and facilities for visitors would improve the quality of the visitor experience and could encourage more visitors without damaging the character of the place.

And working together we hope to build a programme of projects within a coherent and shared vision. Implementing this cannot happen overnight. Walter has told us what a successful Regional parks need – and it will also require commitment, resources, courage, hope and investment over the medium to long term to build and develop.

It should be possible to get more from working together within a coherent strategy and avoid significant additional cost. There is a strong argument here that doing things together brings strategic added value at little extra cost.

### **It's going to be jolly exciting.**

I'm asking everyone here to help share in exploring this exciting opportunity.