

REGIONAL PARKS XCHANGE



MORECAMBE BAY EXPERT GROUP
8-9th September 2008

FINAL REPORT

Report prepared by:

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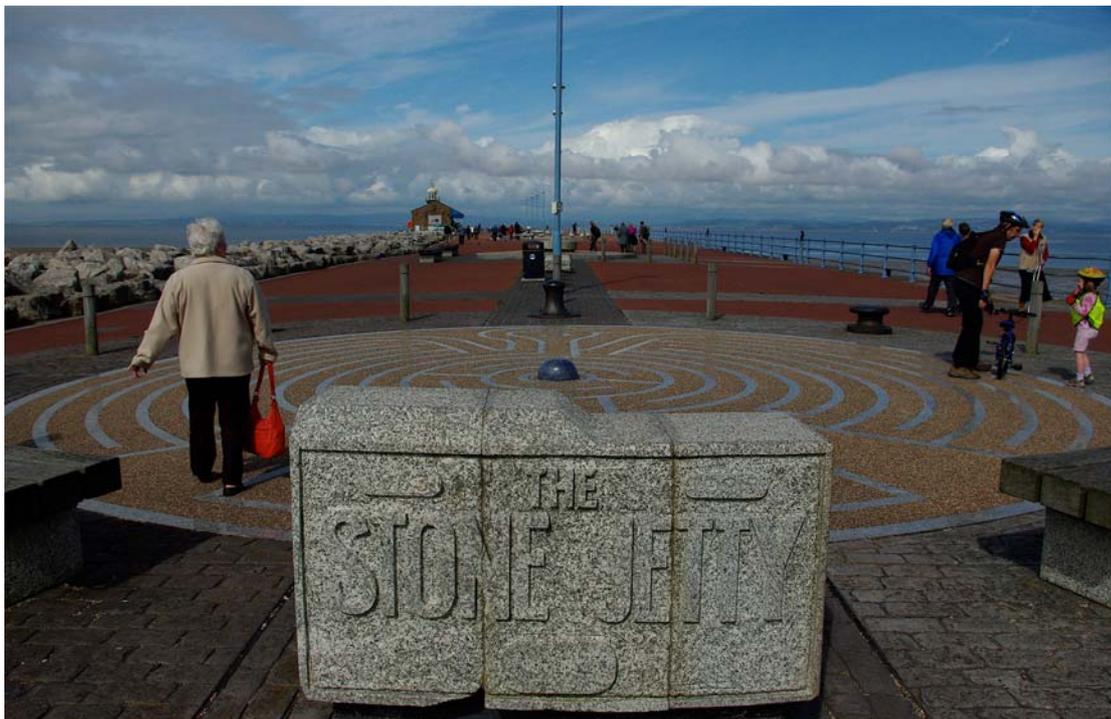
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1.0 Background

The Northwest Regional Economic Strategy (RES) identifies Morecambe Bay as a possible area for a new regional park, one of nine potential regional parks in the Northwest.

Initial discussions indicate that the concept of a Morecambe Bay and Duddon Regional Park has mixed support from the local authorities. Some are extremely positive about what a regional park will bring to the area, others still need to be convinced and require further clarification. Common thoughts are “just what is this thing?”, “what can it give us that we don’t already have?”, “Will it compete with and confuse the things we are already happy with?” and, “What’s in for us?”. An ‘identity crisis’ has emerged between those who value the notion of the programme and its collective strategic value and those who are just not sure why to press ahead with another ‘park’.

In spring 2008, the Morecambe Bay Partnership commissioned Genecon to undertake a scoping study to assess whether the concept for a new regional park for Morecambe Bay and Duddon had sufficient merit to progress further. At the same time, post graduate students from the University of Liverpool Department of Civic Design prepared detailed Area Action Plans for Morecambe Bay. Both studies provide a wealth of information and ideas for the regional park.



2.0 Introducing the Morecambe Bay Expert Group

The Regional Parks Xchange and Morecambe Bay Partnership identified a need to review the information provided by the studies and to pick out the key points and projects that could be used to promote the concept of a park and build political support. It was agreed that one way to do this was by assembling a group of experts over 2 days to experience the area and address the issues.

Experts were selected from the fields of regeneration, planning, housing, environment, culture and rural issues. All experts were based in the Northwest but not necessarily with any prior knowledge of Morecambe Bay. It was intended that the Expert Group would be able to experience the area from a fresh perspective.

The experts were:

Kate Willard	Facilitator (rural, Cumbrian issues)
Simon Bedford	Drivers Jonas (property, regeneration)
Anthony Benson	Urban Practitioners (urban design, planning)
Ian Banks	Atoll (arts, cultural heritage and architecture)
Walter Menzies	Mersey Basin Campaign (water, sustainability)

In addition to the experts, Richard Tracey (Northwest Regional Development Agency) and Susannah Bleakley (Morecambe Bay Partnership) participated in the event and acted as provocateurs. The event was organised and attended by Sarah Heyes and Kate Fox from the Regional Parks Xchange.



3.0 The Programme

The Morecambe Bay Expert Group event was structured over two days and based at the Midland Hotel, Morecambe. Day 1 was all about information gathering in the form of presentations, site visits and discussions with key stakeholders. Day 2 was based entirely at the hotel with structured discussions between the experts about the key issues.

	Day 1
1030	Welcome and introductions
1040	Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Welcome to Morecambe Bay ○ A word from NWDA ○ Success factors of a regional park ○ Genecon report overview ○ University of Liverpool study overview ○ Videos – Millom and Sunderland Point
1200	Site Visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Walking tour of Morecambe ○ Train from Carnforth to Ulverston over Kent and Leven estuaries ○ Visit to Piel Island ○ Drive through Barrow and past Furness Abbey ○ Walk up Hoad Hill, Ulverston
1945	Discussion session with key stakeholder dinner guests: initial thoughts on Morecambe Bay and a SWOT analysis.
	Day 2
0830-1620	Discussion and workshop sessions on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review of day 1 ○ Unique selling point ○ What could a regional park bring to private and public sector partners? ○ Investment plans for the park

4.0 Funding and Budget

The Expert Group event was funded by the NWDA through the Regional Parks Xchange 2008-09 programme.

5.0 Information Gathering

This section notes the key points from the presentations, site visits and discussions on day 1 of the event.

5.1 Welcome to Morecambe Bay

Susannah Bleakley (Morecambe Bay Partnership)

Key points about the bay:

- The bay is vast and is the largest intertidal area in the UK.
- Its size and scale give it a grandeur, a sense of openness and wilderness in which you can relax, unwind and regroup. The area gives you 'headspace'.
- There are fantastic views across the bay – with a foreground of intertidal areas and changing channels and a backdrop of hills.
- The intertidal areas provide the bay with special features such as popular cross-bay walks and fishing by tractors.
- The bay is of international importance for waders and wildfowl and is protected by a number of national and international designations.
- The cockling tragedy of 2004 has had a detrimental effect on Morecambe's public image.
- The bay has many great places for informal recreation, but facilities are patchy and assets undersold. Beaches are often deserted.

5.2 A word from the Development Agency

Richard Tracey (NWDA)

- Morecambe Bay Regional Park could be a 'sleeping giant'
- 3 enemies of the concept are:
 - The term "park" is too ambiguous;
 - Being spread over 2 sub-regional partnerships makes things difficult; and
 - The Regional Spatial Strategy still only refers to regional parks as "areas of search".
- It is imperative to sort out the governance structure and become the "ultimate partnership".

5.3 Success Factors of A Regional Park

Walter Menzies (Mersey Basin Campaign and Regional Parks Xchange)

A successful regional park should consider the following:

- The strategic backing of the RES and RSS;
- A champion and friend on the NWDA board;
- Sub-regional policy legitimacy;
- Heavyweight “political” leadership at the local level;
- A coherent management structure;
- A dedicated secretariat or professional staff;
- A strong concept both spatial and functional;
- Economic benefits/ drivers for the regional park;
- Integrated communications and branding; and
- Resources.

5.4 Genecon Report Overview

Susannah Bleakley (Morecambe Bay Partnership)

- The proposal for a Morecambe Bay and Duddon regional park is at an early stage of development. No boundary has been formalised, but the area under consideration extends from Haverigg to Fleetwood.
- The concept for a regional park has been discussed by the Morecambe Bay Partnership since 2003. The idea was revived with some development funding from the Regional Parks Xchange in Nov 2007.
- Genecon were commissioned to undertake a short scoping study in Feb 2008 to which more than 20 stakeholders contributed.
- The study suggested that a regional park would enable better collaboration between local authorities and allow beneficial projects to be delivered.
- The stakeholders demonstrated a widespread support for moving ahead. Most see the regional park as a way of promoting sustainable development, tourism and environmental protection.
- There was some concern over the relative strength of the bay as a “brand” compared to other tourist destinations in the area.
- Amongst the study’s recommendations are six ‘early wins’ and the structure for a new management board.
- The next step is to hold a meeting of key players on 17th October to build an understanding of what added value a regional park could bring to the area and to build on political support.

5.5 University of Liverpool – student Area Action Plans overview

Sue Kidd (University of Liverpool Department of Civic Design)

Change, challenges and issues identified in the study:

- Climate change will have an impact on the bay and will put greater emphasis on the area's renewable energy generation potential, and a new emphasis on holidays at home.
- The bay has an aging population with pockets of both deprivation and affluence. There must be a focus on promoting active lifestyles and retaining young people.
- The area has a fragile economic base: reliant on a few large employers (pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding and nuclear) with high value jobs, and also a tourism industry with low value, seasonal jobs.
- The area has a strong natural and cultural environment.
- Accessibility is a major issue. Whilst the rail-link is a major plus and described as “the spine of the park”, road connections between communities within the park are poor leaving places like Barrow, Walney and Millom isolated.

Moving forward:

- The students picked up on Mersey Waterfront's “windows on the waterfront” concept.
- Some early win projects were suggested:
 - Arnside pedestrian footbridge
 - Barrow dock buildings to be painted
 - Furness Abbey visitor centre
 - Grange lido site
 - Web portal
- There was a feeling that change will happen anyway, and needs to be guided. “Status quo is not an option”.
- The students became highly engaged in the area.



5.6 Images from the site visits



Midland Hotel, Morecambe



Jug of tea £1.50, Morecambe



Experts on the Jetty, Morecambe



Headspace



Brief Encounter at Carnforth Station



Roa Island looking towards Piel Island



Experts at Roa Island



The Piel Ferry



Piel Castle



The King of Piel



Piel Island



Furness Abbey



Hoad Hill, Ulverston



Reaching the monument



View from Hoad Hill

6.0 Discussion sessions

N.B. Please note that discussion time during this event was limited. The ideas are reported here as record of what was discussed and without having been tested and refined.

6.1 What one word would you use to describe the Morecambe Bay and Duddon Regional park?

- Transition
- Deliverable
- Bay
- Landscape
- Open
- Humanity
- Enclosure
- Culture
- Space
- Water
- Light

6.2 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The bay geography ○ Natural environment ○ Morecambe Bay Partnership 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Over dominance by the Lake District National Park ○ Governance - fragmented across 2 counties ○ Poor leadership ○ Poor vision ○ Resource issues for Morecambe Bay Partnership
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Irresistible landscape ○ Building on the Morecambe Bay Partnership 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integrated Regional Strategy - what provision will be made for regional parks? ○ Elderly population around the bay

6.3 What is special about Morecambe Bay now? Unique Selling Point

- Rolling grandeur of the bay landscape: vast scale, a feeling of space and openness, remote, tranquil, isolation.
- An elemental landscape: mud, water and sky.
- An assault on the senses creating a strong emotional response of awe and wonder.
- A constantly changing canvas worthy of a Turner prize.
- The mystery and danger of the shifting sands.
- Great diversity across the bay.
- A quirky experience with a personal touch.
- A sense of discovery of hidden places (e.g. Chapel and Piel Islands).
- A living place with real communities.
- Strong cultural and unique heritage.
- Strong, individual identity of small towns around the bay.
- Morecambe has an independent, old-fashioned offer: Blackpool with A-levels!
- Places are not premier league and have a melancholic edge.
- Scenic train route linking places around the bay. No need for a car.
- Great opportunities for: boat trips across the bay; new houses with a distinctive architecture – designer beach huts; big capacity for increasing visitor numbers.

6.4 What added value and benefits would the regional park bring to the public and private sectors?

- Branding benefits – a great opportunity to raise the profile of the area and erase the current negative image.
- Draw together and promote fringe locations that are not currently linked to the bigger picture.
- Collaborative working benefits – across local authorities and tourist boards could gain 'brownie points' with the NWDA and enable the delivery of shared objectives without creating additional work.
- Economic benefits – increased visitor numbers and higher spending visitors will benefit the local economy.
- Infrastructure benefits – a good opportunity to coordinate public transport links to the bays key assets and communities. Greater connectivity. This will attract NWDA investment as visitor carbon footprint is reduced.
- Health benefits – improving access to informal recreational facilities across the bay will have positive implications for health.
- Lower risk for businesses as the regional park provides a foundation of support.

What projects would illustrate the added value?

Accessibility and Infrastructure projects:

- Integrated transport
- Arnside footbridge
- Ferry link across the bay
- Sailing links from Barrow to Windermere
- Cruise ships to spend time in the bay

Accommodation projects

- Design competition
- Affordable housing
- Designer beach huts

Promotion and branding

- Communications, marketing and branding strategy

Art/ culture projects:

- 'Monument' to Chinese cockle pickers. A safe haven.
- Iconic artwork at key locations (e.g. railway stations)
- Integrated cultural strategy

Additional actions needed to take this forward:

- Lobby members
- Align two tourist boards
- Quantify economic benefits
- Links to University of Cumbria
- Consider the name and loose the word "park"

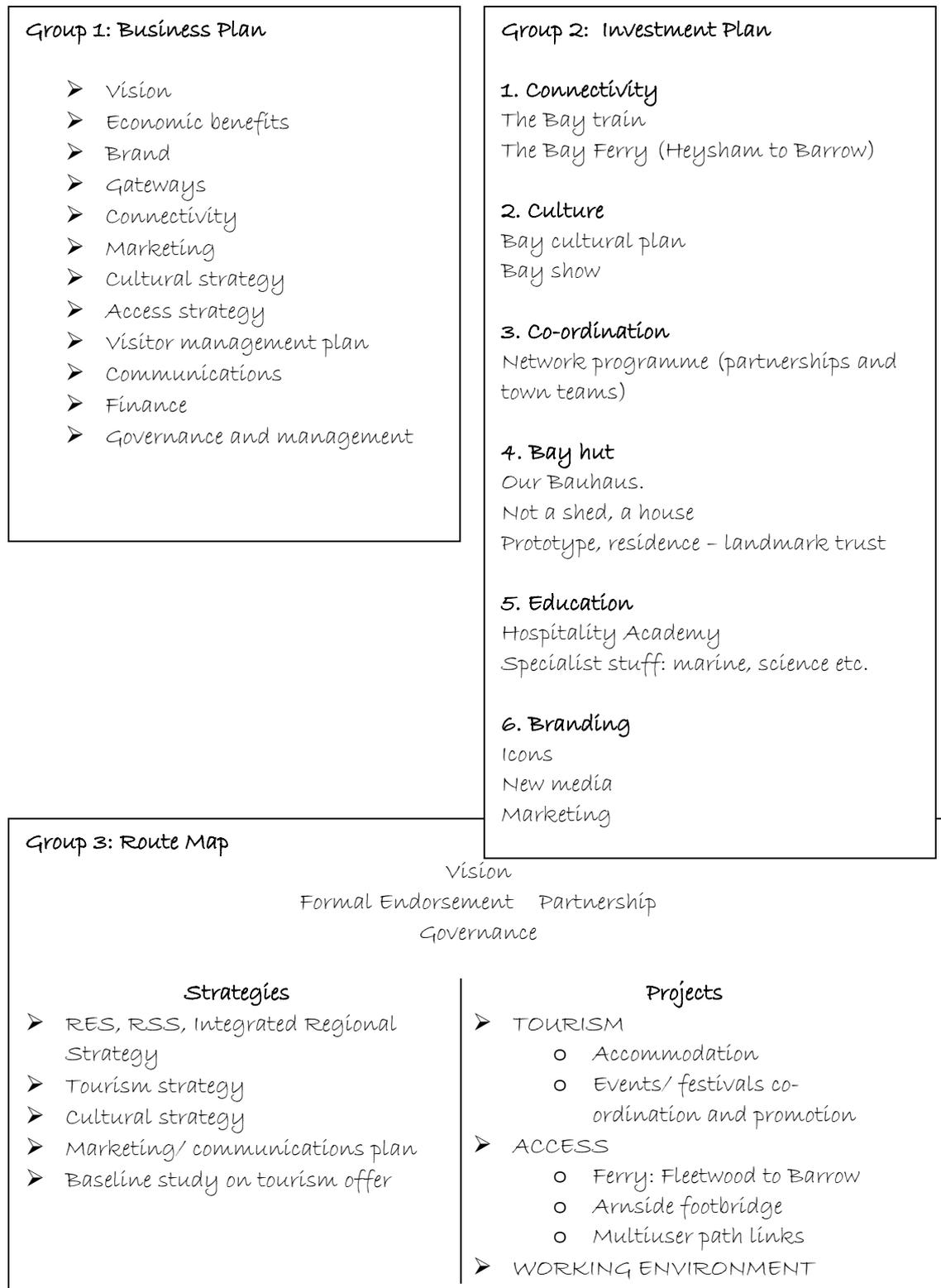
Other discussion points:

Providing opportunities for young people to stay and work in the Bay is hugely important. A career in the hospitality sector needs to be made attractive with proper skills training and career prospects.

One way of attracting investment in the area is by promoting Morecambe Bay as a TV location. A soap/ TV show along similar lines to "The Lakes" could give the area a higher profile and encourage private investment.

6.5 Bringing it all together – an investment plan for the regional park.

In 3 groups, the experts put forward their business/ investment plans for the future of the Morecambe Bay and Duddon Regional Park as follows:



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