

## Developing a shared story and vision for Lowestoft

### Lowestoft: the leading light

#### Our journey so far

Lowestoft has been experiencing change and regeneration over a number of years and is a place with potential for growth that will benefit the indigenous and incoming population. The Investment Plan will land in a **fertile environment** alive with projects and plans underway, ambition, aspiration, collaboration, community engagement and a **desire to do things differently**.

**Transformation is being felt across Lowestoft** with initiatives such as an iconic new river crossing, the extensive redevelopment of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, significant investment in the offshore renewables industry, major new flood defences and both community and high-profile cultural activity.

However, we have a **collective understanding** that the **opportunities** offered by growth in the offshore energy and marine sector, the tremendous potential of tourism, a focus on culture and investment in infrastructure sit alongside significant **challenges** of deprivation, skills, housing availability, suitable employment land and a declining town centre exacerbated by the implications of Covid 19.

This led **East Suffolk Council** to adopt **priority themes** for Economic Regeneration. **Homes** where thousands of new, quality dwellings are developed within walking distance of the town centre to provide vitality and support employment; **Employment** to exploit the offshore renewables sector as a centre of excellence; **Retail and Leisure** repurposing the town centre as a community hub and leisure facility for residents and visitors; **Transport and Access** to open up housing and employment opportunities and optimise sustainable transport and **Culture and Heritage** to improve the attractiveness of the area and establish a new strand of the economy.

The Council and partners alongside successful mechanisms such as the Enterprise Zone and Heritage Action Zone are making progress in optimising the opportunities and taking on the challenges but the ambition of stakeholders meant we all felt there was still **a missing piece of the jigsaw**. We wanted something that articulated a future Lowestoft, that joined all these interventions and aspirations together and presented an ambitious, deliverable but most critically, shared view of what the place could become; **the Lowestoft Story**.

This needed to be a **‘place led’** not ‘organisation led’ piece of work that reflected the views of our stakeholders Lowestoft, something they could believe in and get behind, **something to excite and inspire** and a goal that all the projects and programmes including the Towns Fund will be delivering. The power of our story is that externally it will provide a focus to attract investment, funding, relocation etc. whilst internally it can develop much needed pride and a collaborative community in Lowestoft.

#### The Lowestoft Story

In September 2018 Making Waves Together (the Great Places Project for Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth) asked place specialist thinkingplace to facilitate a workshop with key stakeholders to understand the potential of this approach and what it could mean for Lowestoft. The workshop fired people’s imaginations, they could see a place story was the missing link and thinkingplace was commissioned to develop a new narrative for Lowestoft based on a detailed review of existing research and engagement with a wide-range of stakeholders.

This work is a **tremendous ‘place led’ foundation for the Investment Plan activity** we are planning. thinkingplace is the acknowledged UK leader in this type of activity and a partner of the Institute of Place Management based at Manchester Metropolitan University, the Task Force for the Future High Streets Fund programme. Lowestoft is now in the fantastic position that **every project and intervention including the Towns Fund is or could be clearly seen to be supporting and contributing to the strategic and shared view of what Lowestoft can become.**

The Lowestoft Story (full version in appendix x) sets out our ambition, highlights our distinctiveness and describes the place our stakeholders want to see develop; it is a litmus test for everything we do across the place including projects within the Towns Fund. Our story themes whilst not fully in place in the town and area provide focus and ambition for what we will do and say and our big idea is a more emotive statement of intent.

### *Themes*

#### **Harnessing and celebrating the energy of the sea**

Lowestoft has been defined by its relationship with the sea, it has always been the provider and determined a special sense of place via tourism, fishing and oil and gas exploration. The major opportunity for the town and area is now renewable wind energy and developing a significant base and supply chain for this.

Alongside this is better connecting with and optimising the asset of the seaside experience via way finding, public realm, events and facilities for both local people and tourists.

#### **Exploring the eastscape**

Lowestoft offers myriad experiences for young and old from beach fun for all the family to The Broads National Park and Carlton Marshes on the doorstep. A variety of landscapes, big skies and space to breathe to just feel better about yourself.

This is reflected in the activities on offer from local walks and cycling to bird watching and messing about on boats. A great place to live, visit and grow your family.

### *Big Idea*

#### **Lowestoft: the leading light**

This is a place of firsts and as the most easterly point in the UK being leading is our watch word. We’re celebrating being on the edge in terms of our industry, culture and visitor offer. We have a fresh energy to do things differently in creating a new first place.

#### Lowestoft: we’re doing things differently

The Investment Plan has come at a great time for Lowestoft in that it will provide additionality and added value to a new and exciting approach to place making and a lot of projects and interventions already underway. Hence, it will offer multiplier benefit as we are already on our journey of economic regeneration.

- We have a shared place story that sets out a Lowestoft of the future developed in collaboration with our stakeholders
- We have widened place leadership having established a cross sector Place Board that will oversee the development of the investment plan and future regeneration of Lowestoft

- We are taking place-based collaboration to a new level with our new Ambassadors programme and partnership work involving East Suffolk Council, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, Lowestoft Town Council, Business in the Community, businesses, third sector, cultural organisations, education and many others
- We are 'place led' in all we do having taken stakeholders on a journey so they are empowered and engaged in deciding what the place can become and helping deliver that

### **A Vision for Lowestoft**

Lowestoft has created the right environment, collaborative mindset and appetite for change that allows us to set out a bold vision which involves widening place leadership and empowering stakeholders.

As a place we all knew we had to be brave enough to repurpose Lowestoft and the Coronavirus pandemic has made that even more paramount. To deliver this there are some **clear trends** that our vision reflects: **live, work, local** as the need and desire to travel becomes much reduced with the consequent need for a quality mixed tenure of housing close to the centre; **aspiration and ambition** so everyone aims higher and believes they can be successful in their place; **skilled and self-reliant** focussing on up skilling local people, attracting new talent where necessary and growing a sustainable and inclusive local economic base; **retaining and inspiring young people** to grow and keep our own talent; **collaborating and connecting** across the region and to London, digitally to open up job opportunities, cross sector, place led; **resilient and sustainable** to be robust and adaptive in responding to climate change; **community and coming together** as our town centre once again becomes a vibrant hub; **functionality and fun** where needs are met, some shopping provided but where leisure and escapism have a leading role and given recent experiences the importance of my place being where **I'm happy and a place I call home**.

### **Employment, enterprise and skills**

Lowestoft's economy has always been inextricably linked with the sea and what began with fishing became the place of Birds Eye and frozen food which gave way to oil and gas exploration and now we have a unique opportunity to be the centre for Offshore Wind Energy.

The world's largest offshore wind market is off the East Anglian coast and Lowestoft already has considerable strengths and resources in this sector which with key interventions will provide significant growth potential and a once in a generation opportunity to develop as a centre of excellence in this field.

This will provide a range of job opportunities and specifically give our young people the chance to develop skills, earn more, establish businesses and build their lives in Lowestoft. The enormous commercial potential aligns perfectly with the town being the home to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) which has just developed a multi-million pound campus. This will allow us to grow an exemplar marine sciences cluster of expertise, local supply chain and the opportunity to develop a local skills hub.

Our fantastic environment with stunning beaches, wild, natural landscapes and The Broads National Park has meant that a significant part of the economy has been tourism related since Victorian times. With a focus on our First Light experience, events, cultural activity and a more 'joined up' offer with other attractions such as The Broads National Park, this is a growth area for Lowestoft. It

also reflects why we need to maximise our efforts around being climate resilient and caring for the ecosystem that makes us such an attractive place to visit.

Our successful Enterprise Zone will be the catalyst for the further interventions needed to realise this opportunity and with partners maximise private sector investment. Our focus is bringing forward employment land especially with quayside access and building on the success of ventures such as PowerPark. This will allow us to provide 'move on' space and provide a home for leading businesses in the offshore renewable sector.

### **Transforming our town centre; retail and leisure**

Lowestoft intends to capitalise on the trends that are influencing the evolution of town centres such as local focus, leisure, creating a community hub, celebrating distinctiveness and has a special set of assets and an ambitious masterplan to enable it do that. Where else would you find a High Street with two jewels at either end; a medieval streetscape with amazing features such as historic alleyways leading to the seafront and stunning sandy beaches providing an unspoilt seaside experience.

These jewels are going to be polished and brought to life by a fresh approach to enhancing the experience of the town centre through four distinct but connected quarters. This will involve reimagining the heritage assets of Lowestoft through the renovation and repurposing of buildings to host creative businesses, storytelling through new public realm, street animation bringing the triangle market to life, all creating a vibrant, artisan village feel to Old Lowestoft. We are going to enhance the town centre offer and experience ensuring there is a thriving evening economy to benefit residents and visitors alike.

Central to this transformation will be refreshing the fantastic assets already in place such as the Marina theatre and developing the surrounding space with more leisure opportunities and eating and drinking experiences; a quality environment to linger longer. Hence, our welcome and sense of arrival is vitally important and the linkages and wayfinding from Station Square will highlight and celebrate the jewels of Lowestoft.

Lowestoft has a beautiful seafront with big skies, beautiful light and an unspoilt sense of place not often found by the sea. The vision is to make more people aware of this asset and to open it up for different experiences and different age groups. The First Light Festival being an exemplar of this approach and we want to ensure this success is built upon as our seafront regeneration attracts a new demographic who can experience enhanced leisure facilities by the sea.

### **Celebrating our culture and heritage**

Lowestoft is experiencing a cultural renaissance and is enjoying re-inventing 'being on the edge'. This is a place that is creatively edgy as well as being the most easterly point of the UK; the aim is to make the most of these for residents and visitors alike. The highly innovative and high profile First Light Festival highlighted the potential the place has to be a cultural hotbed that is a significant part of the economy but also benefits the well being of residents and strengthens their pride in their place. Culture will be the 'glue' that holds community together and connects them with their place.

The Lowestoft Cultural Strategy is the bedrock of this new approach and sets out the opportunities a sustainable events and cultural programme will offer especially as it has significant assets to leverage from historic Lowestoft to the seafront experience. This calls for storytelling, public realm and a focus on new product that highlights what makes Lowestoft special such as a new visitor facility at Ness Point which portrays what it's like being the most easterly point in the UK.

Lowestoft is also looking to attract a new creative community who want a different place experience with all the special sense of place, texture and landscape the place provides from The Broads to industry and heritage to coastline. The opportunity to live and work in a historic setting such as Old Lowestoft is massively appealing and affordable. Investment into appreciating culture in its broadest sense will also allow focus on the place's significant natural assets, the importance of a special environment and the criticality of climate change for Lowestoft's future.

### **Living your life in Lowestoft**

As Lowestoft grows and becomes more economically vibrant it needs places to live that reflect this and that requires a range of provision from affordable to more aspirational. The employment linked to offshore renewable businesses will come from the indigenous population but also by attracting talent, it's important the place is attractive to incomers so as to boost skills where needed and ensure the town continues to grow in every sense.

There is a wide ranging approach to future proofing demand which includes town centre living above properties, in reused properties such as the old Post Office and the Lake Lothing development which has the potential for thousands of new homes. The latter has the opportunity to be transformational for Lowestoft and will be directly related to new employment opportunities from the offshore sector.

This ambitious programme will mean considerable private sector investment and different ways of bringing forward opportunities as well as presenting the economic potential of Lowestoft in a more regional context. The new story of Lowestoft and the collaborative approach this has spawned will be pivotal in realising this potential.

### **Collaboration and connecting**

Lowestoft is very aware of its location and that most of its industry is actually to the east and out at sea! The town runs the risk of feeling and being perceived as peripheral and literally on the edge. However, the new Lowestoft story is changing this narrative and reflecting stakeholders views as to what is an amazing opportunity of being the centre of the offshore renewables industry and from a tourism perspective the most easterly point of the UK; both of these are under exploited offers.

Lowestoft is thinking bigger, wider and reaching out which means collaborating and building relationships with places that will help drive its prosperity such as The Broads, Great Yarmouth, Norwich and London. Whether in growing the offshore renewables part of the local economy, attracting tourists, developing a broad cultural offer or attracting relocators a regional perspective is fundamental and Lowestoft is determined to be at the heart of the action.

In considering how the place grows it will be vital to ensure that a response to climate change and protection of the very environment that makes Lowestoft so special is interwoven through everything the place does. This is the perfect place for active transport involving physical activity in a natural setting be that cycling or walking with the appropriate infrastructure to support the healthy living agenda. From sustainable and smart communities to flood defences, sensitive development and appropriate commercial activity Lowestoft has to embed an adaptive, resilient, innovative and exemplar approach.

Lowestoft is already pursuing a raft of transformational connections that are vital to its future with the third river crossing set to open up residential and industrial growth potential whilst reducing congestion and associated pollution. Improvements are being sought in rail connectivity to London and nearby cities and cycling initiatives aim to promote healthy living and more sustainable local

transport. Critically, as the town looks to realise it's live/work potential for creative and similar enterprises it is absolutely focussed on improved digital connectivity.

### **Lowestoft: the leading light**

In Lowestoft we're proud that all our stakeholders have a shared ambition and aspiration for the town and area that they reflected in their forward looking and distinct story for the place. The Investment Plan is another and important way we are going to bring our story to life for the benefit of everyone associated with Lowestoft.

We know we have to constantly aspire to be first and strive to be leading in everything we do and that means inspiring our community to be the best it can be. Lowestoft has so much going for it but we need to celebrate and communicate our successes. We have fresh energy not only to look at our place differently but to do things differently. This means building a resilient and adaptive community who have the confidence to think big, look outwards whilst never forgetting that what made us special will forge our future.

**We are creating a new first place**