

Historic England **Urban Panel**

Ramsgate Visit 28-29 September 2016

Final Report

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1. Executive Summary

The Urban Panel visited Ramsgate on 28-9 September 2016 at the request of the District Council and was supported in its examination of both Ramsgate and the recent successes of regeneration in Margate by the Council's staff.

Ramsgate's heritage provides a tangible and valuable resource for regeneration of the town – a town which, in spite of areas of wealth and success, also has a concentration of wards that fall within the top 10% of indices of deprivation. The Panel was invited to consider a number of related issues centring on the Harbour and its uses but also the neighbouring port and the adjoining parts of the town centre.

The Panel was able to meet representatives of several community organisations over dinner, providing an opportunity to discuss the issues and opportunities facing the town in an informal atmosphere. In addition to a bus tour of the east and west cliff areas, the Panel undertook walking tours of the Royal Harbour and Harbour Street and environs to assess the current performance of the town centre and recent planning issues.

The compact town centre and harbour, the Panel felt, provide an initial focus for visitors to explore which can act as a springboard to the heritage assets of the east and west cliffs. The activity of fishing and a working historic harbour is Ramsgate's key selling point as an attraction for visitors. Ramsgate clearly has strength of expertise within the community, as shown by the support for various projects including the Motor House Project, but poor relationships between these groups and with the Council is making concerted action more difficult and is frustrating for local people wanting to influence decision-making.

The Panel was impressed by the independent enterprise of Ramsgate's community organisations in taking forward a number of regeneration initiatives. However, Ramsgate needs an agreed strategy for regeneration not only to guide decision-making within the Council but also as a common plan of action for disparate community groups, landowners and investors to understand how their actions will contribute to the town's renaissance. The strategy needs to involve local residents, businesses and landowners in making the decisions that will determine the town's future, including making the best use of their heritage assets.

Amongst the recommendations of the Panel were:

- The Council should aim to facilitate a process of community planning that capitalises on Ramsgate's strong tradition of independent-minded and entrepreneurial businesses and residents.
- The plan needs to set out a positive vision for the future that builds on the Harbour and town centre's many strengths and starts to address negative self-image, perhaps injecting fresh perspectives rather than recycling previous ideas.
- The implementation strategy needs to show how responsibility for management of the Harbour and town centre's heritage assets will be shared with the community, including businesses and the voluntary sector; improved

relationships with community groups is an essential precursor if this is to succeed.

- Regeneration of the Harbour area needs to build on the positive work of bringing activity to the arches.
- Supporting the fishing industry is a priority to secure the attraction this provides for the visitor economy.
- The Council needs to consider how using its extensive estate of property in the town, including numerous historic buildings, can contribute to regeneration, including addressing deprivation.
- The Council should raise its aspirations for design quality in new developments, making use of Design South East's design review service where appropriate.
- Where transgression of regulations is negatively affecting regeneration objectives, the Council needs to show strong leadership through enforcement.

2. About the Urban Panel

The Urban Panel is made up of volunteers who provide expertise to help local authorities, development agencies and others engaged in major regeneration of historic towns and cities. Panel members are appointed by the Chairman of Historic England. Each has considerable experience in either the public or private sector and is considered a national expert in their field. At any one time the Panel has between 12 and 20 members each serving for a period of three years. The membership includes expertise in conservation, property, development economics, design and development – including architecture and other built environment professionals: archaeology, gardens and landscape, retail, history and regeneration.

The Panel's remit is to engage with Government policy and best practice as it relates to urban regeneration and the historic environment; to guide Historic England on related urban issues; and to provide useful strategic advice to public and private bodies with an interest in places where significant changes to the built environment are being planned.

For the Ramsgate visit the panel comprised:

Peter Studdert – Architecture, Town Planning (Acting Chair)

Dr Nigel Baker – Archaeology

Ms Johanna Gibbons – Landscape Design

Mike Hayes CBE – Urban Planning, Economic Regeneration and Public Sector Management

John Lord – Economic Development and Regeneration

John Pringle – Architecture

Ms Sophia de Sousa – History, Architectural History, Community-led design

Ms Ziona Strelitz – Town Planning, Social Anthropology

Chris Twinn – Engineering, Environmental Sustainability

They were supported in their visit by Historic England Staff including:

Chris Smith, Director of Planning

Ms Lyndsay Summerfield, Executive Assistant to Director of Planning

Dr Andy Brown, Planning Director, South East

Martin Small, Principal Historic Environment Planning Advisor, South East

Robert Lloyd-Sweet, Historic Places Adviser, South East

3. Background to the Ramsgate Visit

The Urban Panel was invited to visit Ramsgate and Margate by Thanet District Council following an initial offer of support by Historic England's South East Office. The Panel had previously visited Margate in 2009. This visit provided an opportunity to review developments in Margate since the 2009 visit, including the success of several major public-funded interventions, and to consider whether a similar approach to regeneration in Ramsgate would be suitable.

Ramsgate enjoys an extraordinary inheritance of historic buildings and places reflecting the dual but at times separate developments of the town and Royal Harbour. This heritage now provides a tangible and valuable resource for regeneration of the town which, in spite of a rich environment and areas of wealth and success, also has a concentration of wards that fall within the top 10% of indices of deprivation.

Thanet District Council is concerned to play an active role in promoting and managing the process of regeneration to benefit all of Ramsgate's communities. They are seeking advice on a strategy for both the regeneration of the harbour area and the town centre, including its immediate environs.

Key areas the Panel was asked to consider included:

- The environmental impact of the adjacent Port and its effect on the setting of historic structures (including the Grade I listed Pugin complex);
- Safeguarding of traditional harbour businesses, the Slipways, marine engineering and chandlery;
- Viability of the fishing fleet;
- Currently unused floor space in historic buildings – the Ice factory, Gunpowder Store, etc.
- The future of Pier Yard and Clock House

- The Maritime Museum and interpretation of the historic environment
- Backlog of repairs to historic structures
- The 'Pleasurama' site

4. Ramsgate's Historic Environment

Ramsgate provides a surprisingly rich historic environment within a relatively small area. Whilst the area has some notable prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon archaeological remains and evidence of origins as a medieval settlement, the town grew to prominence following the establishment of the Royal Harbour as a port of refuge for the Royal Navy in 1749. Three conservation areas cover the main areas of historic interest: the Ramsgate Conservation Area (mainly focused on the Royal Harbour, Old Town, East Cliff and West Cliff), the Ramsgate Royal Esplanade Conservation Area (the focus of which is the cliff top bowling greens, croquet lawns and Lido) and the Ramsgate Montefiore Conservation Area, which includes part of the former Montefiore Park estate (although another part of this landscape is now the George VI Memorial Park). In addition to the commercial buildings of the town centre (shops, warehouses and inns) and the military and maritime structures of the harbour, the town retains numerous structures related to the leisure pursuits of holiday makers who historically contributed so much to the town's prosperity, as well as a remarkable focus of buildings designed by members of the Pugin dynasty of architects who made Ramsgate their home.

The map below shows the density of listed buildings within the town centre and around the Royal Harbour and adjoining areas, providing an indication of the quality of the historic environment as a whole and the multiple foci of heritage assets.

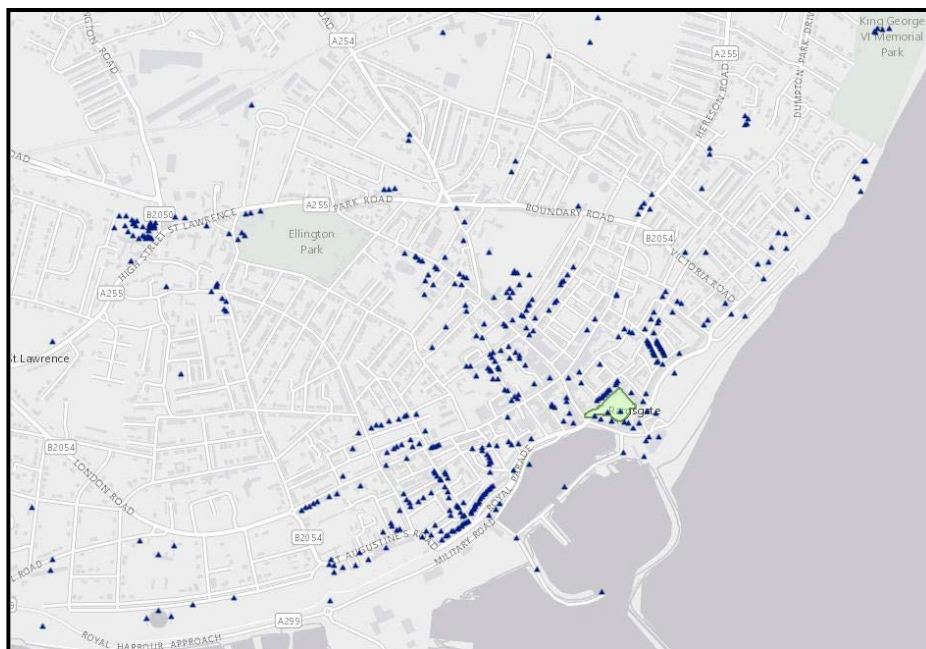


Figure 1: Map of Central Ramsgate's listed buildings

5. Background to Planning for Ramsgate

Supported by Thanet District Council and Ramsgate Town Council, the Ramsgate Coastal Community Team published an Economic Plan for Ramsgate in April 2016, which provides a helpful background to issues facing the town:

“Ramsgate conforms to the common pattern of seaside towns in the UK with high unemployment, low skills base, poor educational attainment, poor health, an ageing population, and a higher proportion of lone parents on income support and claimants in receipt of disability benefit. It is made up of seven electoral wards: Cliffsend and Pegwell, Central Harbour, Eastcliff, Sir Moses Montefiore, Nethercourt, Newington, and Northwood.

The population of around 40,500 is predominantly white British. The demographic profile is similar to Thanet overall with a relatively low BME population and an increasing number of Eastern Europeans as well as inward migration of both home-owners and benefit claimants from London.

Ramsgate has always attracted retirees, but there is a trend for mature people and families to relocate to Ramsgate from London and its surrounding areas attracted by the relatively low house prices and the ‘seaside life style’. These people often have the skills to work from home. However as in the past, the area does continue to attract those reliant on the state for support.

Ramsgate was ranked fourth behind Blackpool, Clacton and Hastings in the ONS rankings for Coastal Community Deprivation (2014). The town has high levels of deprivation within four of its seven wards each containing LSOAs within the bottom decile. Severe income deprivation is found in five of the seven wards and it affects both children and older people. The town is struggling with low education and skills, affecting adults, children and young people. Educational development and attainment is poor, particularly in Newington, Northwood and Eastcliff where there are also a higher percentage of children with special educational needs.

Residents of Ramsgate have a high incidence of poor health and an average life expectancy significantly lower than the figures for Kent as a whole. Adult obesity levels are high with obesity in children increasing between reception and year six. The prevalence of mental health issues is greater in Ramsgate than the Thanet area as a whole.

Crime is exacerbated by drug and alcohol abuse, particularly assaults on the person and property theft. Death from chronic liver disease is almost double the regional average for both men and women. Thanet has more licensed premises than any other area of Kent and, within Thanet, Ramsgate has the highest number of public houses.

Some of the positive aspects of the town are highlighted in the ONS data on barriers to housing and services, and living environment in particular outdoor environment.”

In addition to this information it is worth noting that whilst Ramsgate’s BME population forms a lower proportion of the population than in Kent as an average, the East Cliff and Central Harbour Wards have a higher proportion of BME residents than other Ramsgate localities (see Kent Public Health Observatory Report, 2015, Thanet CCG Locality Profile: Ramsgate, http://www.kpho.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/51061/Ramsgate-Localities-Profile.pdf).

6. The Panel’s visit

6.1 Orientation Tour

Arriving by train, the Panel was introduced to Ramsgate through a bus tour with an informative commentary on the area’s history and planning challenges by the District’s long-standing conservation architect, Nick Dermott. This included a review of the approach to the town centre from Ramsgate Station, The Montefiore Estate, including both the conservation area and entrance to King George VI Memorial Park, The East Cliff, including Winterstoke Gardens (the legacy of Dame Janet Stancomb Wills), Victoria Parade and Albion Place Gardens (Ramsgate’s only Registered Park and Garden, including a notable Pulhamite ravine), as well as the West Cliff area, including the a second Pulhamite ravine, West Cliff Concert Hall (now ‘Project Motor House’), the complex of ‘Pugin Architecture’ at The Grange and the Edwardian and Early 20th century ‘leisure landscape’ of the Royal Esplanade beyond.

6.2 Introduction: Thanet District Council and Ramsgate’s Regeneration

Following their initial tour the Panel met with representatives of the District Council at the Royal Temple Yacht Club and received presentations on Ramsgate’s heritage and the current planning context. Director of Community Services, Rob Kenyon, described the present condition of Thanet as an area with high potential for tourism due to its quality of light, and its beaches, as well as its heritage assets, ease of access (especially since the introduction of high-speed train services from London) with low land values proving attractive for outside investors (although these are now starting to rise). The Council’s ability to influence change in the area is affected by falling grant-in-aid from central government and the Council is therefore looking at other sources of funding as well as ways to do ‘more for less’. The Council has been challenged to raise its ambition for the area but is also faced with balancing the needs of vocal stakeholder groups with very varied attitudes both for and against change. Nevertheless a recent reorganisation of the District Council means it is now rated by the Local Government Association to have improved significantly, with ‘strong and capable senior management’, ‘respected political leadership’ and ‘improved cross-party relationships’. The area has also seen a significant recent fall in unemployment and a growth in new businesses.

The Council is establishing an economic development and growth team and is keen to promote opportunities for advanced manufacturing (building on the success of Discovery Park just outside the district boundary), off-site manufacturing to support other local industry, as well as arts and creative industries. Local gallery and studio space is already in high demand. Research on the potential opportunities for the arts and creative industries has been commissioned. The Council also expects growth in 'green' industry and agri-industry and Thanet is well placed to service these through the port. A key element of promoting the area's tourism industry will be to attract further hoteliers.

Key challenges identified as affecting regeneration of Ramsgate included the absence of a formal 'plan' for the area that could be used to assess proposed schemes. At present the desire is to both protect and realise the value of heritage for Thanet and to structure decisions to gain long-lasting (even if slow to deliver) benefits for the area as a whole.

Nick Dermott provided further information on the development of the harbour and town, including the development of Ramsgate as a holiday resort. One particular element of this story noted by the Panel was the now lost Ramsgate Harbour station (lost to fire in 1998), accessed by a long tunnel, which is still present and is in part used as a visitor attraction.

6.3 Managing the harbour

The Council's Technical Services Manager gave a presentation on the recent history of development and operation of the 'new' port, developed in 1979 and owned and managed by the District Council. The adjacent Royal Harbour provides approximately 700 leisure berths and is home to the South East's largest fishing fleet. The Port provides four roll-on roll-off berths and is Britain's second closest port to the continent after Dover. Passenger ferry services ceased in 2013, in spite of investment in a tunnel providing an alternative route from the M20/M2 that bypassed the town centre. Recent development has included considerable growth in use by car importers (it now has capacity for 4,500 cars to be delivered at any one time), development of aggregates shipping and the development of the London Array offshore wind farm, which is installed and serviced from Ramsgate. The latter includes a dedicated training centre. Recent investments in the port and harbour have included the replacement of a breakwater, development of pontoons for small boat owners and several large boat moorings (partly facilitating the use of the harbour for servicing the wind farm).

The Council also manages the Royal Harbour and recently undertook the enhancement of the Military Road Arches including the insertion of mezzanine floors and servicing. This has resulted in a rise from 50% to 100% occupancy including a mixture of retail and café businesses with higher rental yields, whilst maintaining more traditional chandlery businesses that support the harbour function. The port's maintenance includes significant annual dredging whilst future investment to promote it is expected to include an improved 'along-side' loading quay, which will also provide facilities for boat servicing. An additional roll-on roll-off berth may also be needed.

6.4 Ramsgate's recent planning history

Thanet District Council's Planning Manager provided a review of recent applications around the harbour area, which has seen a recent surge in activity. The existing planning policy framework has been very flexible allowing the Council some leeway in decision-making. Key recent permissions described included:

- The 2004 permission for major redevelopment at Eastern Undercliff (known officially as Royal Sands Development and popularly as the Pleasurama site) for a mixed-use scheme including flats, hotel, restaurants, shopping and a children's play area. The development will mask the existing cliff face 'embankment' and create a new focus of activity on the seafront. The height of development was limited to the height of the existing cliff, reducing potential impact to views from Wellington Crescent. This covers the former Ramsgate Harbour station site, which had been derelict for several years. Unfortunately, the land having been sold by the council to a developer and work having commenced some years ago, the development has stalled. Owing to several rounds of legal and financial difficulties, work on the site has still not recommenced. The hoardings which surround the site are known locally as the 'Great Wall of Ramsgate' and have been decorated by the local community in an effort to reduce their visual impact, as well as drawing attention to the unsatisfactory situation of the site's plight.
- The Royal Victoria Pavilion at Harbour Parade was granted listed building consent for major restoration by public house company J D Wetherspoon plc in 2016. Work is now well underway and the building will soon be restored to active use as another key positive historic building in this focal area of the harbour.
- Permission was granted for a Hornby visitor centre to replace the facility currently at Westwood Industrial Estate. This replaces a boat repair business at the slipways to the harbour, between the Clock House and Royal Victoria Pavilion and requires the loss of one of the slipways, although the listed slipway will remain. [*Post visit note – Hornby is understood to have decided against proceeding with the development*]
- The recent permission for redevelopment of a former flour mill designed by E.W. Pugin was highlighted as positive reuse of an historic building elsewhere in the town.
- The Undercliff Car Park (east of the Royal Sands Development) has been identified as a potential site for future development and may be needed to contribute to the 17,140 homes that are expected to be delivered across Thanet as part of the new Local Plan.

The Council is currently progressing the Local Plan, including commissioning a heritage evidence base, and aim to submit the plan for examination in September 2017. The Coastal Community team has, however, been moving forward with an economic plan for Ramsgate as one of three teams in the District (Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate).

The Westwood Cross retail park has been blamed for creating competition for town centres, resulting in decline of the High Street, but is principally designed to compete with Canterbury as a centre for out of town/department store and 'big box' retail that is not otherwise catered for on Thanet. It now needs a sizeable housing component to make it function as a town centre.

6.5 Walking Tour Part 1: The Royal Harbour

The Panel's first walking tour took in Harbour Parade, where the public open space was considered to be poorly organised and failed to provide a suitable foil to the focal role of the area and its surrounding historic buildings. In addition to issues of pedestrian routes, it was considered that use of space failed to exploit the potential of this area to act as a 'front door' to visitors arriving by bus or taxi from the railway station. Issues of parking enforcement and development control were also observed as affecting the quality and functionality of this space, although the colonisation of the pavement area by businesses was considered favourably when properly managed.

The Panel explored the eastern pier with its dramatic views back across the harbour to the waterfront buildings, which provide a very special and distinctive selling point of the town. The current Travelodge Hotel building stands out as incongruous in these views, which are otherwise of consistently high quality architecture, landscape and waterscape. The Panel also visited the Ramsgate Maritime Museum housed in the Clock House, which elicited mixed responses from members. On the one hand it demonstrates considerable community engagement with the history of the harbour, including dedicated volunteers, and helps to ensure the historic building is maintained and open to the public. Its displays have a personal flavour and create a 'cabinet of curiosities' that may be more engaging than a more 'polished' professional display. On the other hand the building appears to be in need of more rigorous maintenance – there is evidence of water ingress for example – whilst the displays are somewhat haphazard and of varying quality and opening is seasonal and dependent on volunteers' availability. The museum, at present, does not fulfil the potential to provide a gateway for tourists to explore and learn about the Royal Harbour and does not set a clear tone for future regeneration and use of the harbour as a destination. The display could be housed in another, purpose-built building, freeing up the Clock House for other activities, although there was concern that this may upset supporters of the museum at present and result in conflict with a dedicated local community group.

From the museum the Panel followed the cross wall separating the inner and outer harbours. The former hovercraft pad was noted for its decayed condition but potential, with enhancement, to act as more of a focus for waterside activity. The storage cages used by fishermen were noted as necessary to support this important feature of the area's economy but also as reducing the area available for other related activity that could provide outlets for produce of fishing or that could raise the visibility of fishing. It was noted that they are not ideal for the fishermen's uses at present but that other storage facilities that are available are on short term and unreliable leases, reducing confidence in the industry. Alternative solutions for storing fishing gear and providing other facilities for fishermen were considered a

priority, alongside using this sheltered area within the harbour as a focus for activity such as markets and restaurants allied to the industry. The Panel was non-committal about the scale of potential additional development, such as the construction of a new museum or visitor-centre on the dock adjacent to the RNLI building. However, members were interested in the potential of revealing the historic cobbled surface that had been insensitively covered with non-descript 'blacktop'. The historic paving was considered a distinctive element of public realm that is already present, whereas it would be a major investment to provide new paving of similar quality as part of the area's enhancement.

At the western side of the harbour, the Panel viewed the Powder Magazine (built 1828) as a structure with potential to provide a counterpoint to the clock house on the east side but currently disused, before moving onto the area of Jacob's Ladder, the ice factory, Sailors' Church and Smack Boys' Home. This group of buildings and structures should form a cluster of interest that would provide a halting point for visitors. However, the ice factory building is unused and not well maintained. The relatively unprepossessing exterior does not indicate the extent of the building behind which extends into the cliff. One option suggested was to use this building to provide facilities for the fishing community, including both the storage and training space needed as well as public use such as exhibition or restaurant space to strengthen the link between fishing and non-fishing communities, including visitors. Similarly the joint interest of the Church and Smack Boys' Home was also under-developed. A contributing factor to the failure of this area to inspire interest was the extensive space taken up by Military Road. This could now be reduced following the completion of the tunnel as the main approach to the harbour. Here extensive roadside space could provide other uses or as car parking to support harbour uses or tourism.

The improved arches of Military Road were admired as an imaginative and successful scheme making good use of historic structures whilst maintaining traditional harbour-side activity. The public realm at the east end of Military Road, however, was noted as being particularly underwhelming. Before completing the tour, the Panel travelled to the eastern Undercliff Car Park and housing at Marine Esplanade. The Panel was impressed by the potential of the Ramsgate tunnels as an attraction, and intrigued to explore its potential to provide an alternative access route to the beach and harbour.

The Panel also viewed Addington Street, Vale Square and Marlborough Road where investment by residents and new business has brought about some significant improvements, largely through sensitive restoration of historic buildings and spaces.

6.6 Dinner with Invited Community and Council Representatives

Dinner with invited guests is an important part of the Urban Panel visit in that it allows members to discuss the issues and opportunities affecting the area with a range of informed stakeholders in an informal setting. Guests included representatives of the District Council (Officers and Senior Members), Ramsgate Town Council, Coastal Communities Team, Thanet Fishermen's Association, Project Motor House, Vattenfall UK, the Ramsgate Society, Civic Voice, Design South East, St. Augustine's RCC and the Pugin Society.

6.7 Walking Tour 2: Ramsgate Old Town

The Panel's tour of the Ramsgate Old Town included areas of the historic commercial core around Harbour Street, as well as the quieter residential areas, which are considered 'up and coming'.

The tour started at the southern end of Harbour Street. This has been a focus of anti-social behaviour inspired by late night revellers using the taxi office, which has become a hotspot for trouble. Options to move this to an area with a better provision for a taxi rank were considered briefly by the Panel with Harbour Parade suggested as an area that might move revellers away from the core of the town centre. Options for further excluding cars from lower Harbour Street were suggested by the Panel.

Although the town centre is reported as having a high level of vacant shop units, it appears this trend may have seen some improvement and several recently refurbished units were noted along the street. Nevertheless a row of empty units at the southern end of Harbour Street were noted by the Panel as making a strong impression on the rest of the street. It was considered whether this might relate to a single landowner with issues the Council might be able to address and assist with in order to bring these back into beneficial use.

Turning into King Street the variable quality of the townscape was very notable. Whilst the street retains numerous historic buildings that contribute to the interest of the area, it was notable that several buildings constructed in the later 20th century were both of poor quality and apparently more likely to be unoccupied. This left some potential for urban renewal. Rapid mapping to identify buildings and sites that present redevelopment opportunities for town centre housing was suggested. The restored building at the corner of King Street and Plains of Waterloo was pointed out as a positive example of the Council repurposing a historic building for well-appointed social housing now managed by a local housing association.

Returning to Harbour Street, the Panel entered the courtyard space of Albert Court, which includes small areas of public garden, a Petanque Court and a more hard landscape square. This area was not considered to be successful and served the few surviving businesses in the small alley at its north end poorly. Whilst the idea of the Petanque Court, promoting community exercise and interaction, is positive, this took up a large part of the site with a use that is only infrequent and that could be better used for commercial activity to build passing trade for existing businesses. The court might even be moved to the even less inspiring southern end of the enclosed space, or (as a more traditional location for the sport) to a beach front location such as the underused Eastern Undercliff. Considering how well different areas of the Town Centre are used and how they might be developed could also form a spatial element of the regeneration strategy.

The Panel commented on the poor surroundings of York Street and Leopold Street, which are blighted by the bland exteriors of the Travelodge, Wilkinson's Supermarket and Leopold Street car park and then used the West Cliff Arcade, a popular area of

cafés, restaurants and holiday apartments overlooking the harbour, to reach Liverpool Lawn. The recently constructed miniature 'castle' at 40 Liverpool Lawn was commented on as quirky but respectful of the scale of surrounding buildings whilst the vacant Foy Boat public house was noted as being in a key location to encourage activity and reuse. Liverpool Lawn was admired as an extremely attractive residential crescent, although some loss of historic window furniture was also spotted, suggesting that even here the Council may need to consider some additional control and enforcement to ensure the quality of the historic environment is maintained.

The Panel made its way to Addington Street, where the intimate scale of development and survival of numerous historic shopfronts was noted in spite of a general move from commercial to residential use of the ground floor of property, before using the narrow Spencer Street to make their way to Spencer Square where they noted the fine quality of the surrounding buildings, although the quality of the paving and landscaping of the garden square were criticised. The tennis club was identified as a highly successful community facility.

The Panel returned to Addington Street and completed its tour at the recently refurbished Falstaff Hotel to discuss what they had seen and heard over the previous 24 hours.

6.8 Exploring the Challenges

Reflections on the walking tour and dinner highlighted the strength of entrepreneurship within the local community but also the sense of failure of past council leadership that has left a legacy of poor public space, unfinished development, struggling local industry (notably fishing) and community groups feeling unsupported in their efforts to achieve the regeneration the town needs. On the other hand, without an agreed strategy for the town, the Council remains in a position of perpetual 'fire-fighting'. The recent reorganisation of the Council and influx of new staff provides an opportunity for a fresh start, although both officers and members may still be finding their feet and in turn deserve support. A future strategy will need to be developed with the community to stand a chance of succeeding and will be reliant on local good will and the participation of community stakeholders for its delivery.

The Panel was impressed by the richness of Ramsgate's history and the numerous stories of merit, as well as links to on-going traditions (RNLI-rescue, sailing and tall ships and other historic craft, fishing, art, leisure pursuits, etc.) that the town offers. However, in spite of a number of recent schemes, there was a feeling that, in the past, regeneration has happened in spite of rather than with the assistance of the District Council, whilst the rich history isn't always visible or 'readable' for visitors (e.g. caves, fishing or Ramsgate's role for the Royal Navy and as a port for embarking and receiving troops). The need to enhance the public realm stands out as an area where an organisation with a wider remit, i.e. the District Council working with the County Council, should be making a difference that supports the community's smaller-scale interventions.

Past Council intervention is also criticised locally for focusing on 'hopeless' projects rather than supporting local initiatives. This is exacerbated by the lack of an overview or strategic vision for the area, allowing single issues, such as the future of the Port, to dominate thinking.

Members were pleased to note that the District Council appeared to be getting to grips with its own estate of heritage assets. This emergent understanding needs to be harnessed both to ensure the Council is getting a good economic return from its estate (and tackling maintenance needs) but also to consider how it can be put to work in addressing the town's issues of deprivation, such as providing opportunities for SMEs. The Panel was concerned, however, that there might be a knee-jerk reaction of seeking to sell off elements of the estate for a quick financial win, or to avoid maintenance costs, that otherwise have potential to provide longer-term benefits with the right investment. The Panel considered that commissioning of work within any strategy for regeneration would need to ensure that it covered multiple aspects of regeneration rather than, for example, having a purely conservation or economic/growth aspect. Tackling the issues of deprivation should be the focus of a regeneration strategy and this should mean working with communities rather than focussing on statistics when developing strategy proposals. Elements of this lie outside land-use planning and might include low-cost 'town wellness' initiatives working with the Clinical Commissioning Group and both traditional and non-traditional healthcare providers. Ideally the strategy would include both '3 year turnaround' and longer-term measures. The Panel considered the community support provided by Vattenfall UK to be an important resource that the Town Council and Coastal Community Team need to harness. This might require providing a more visible space for the company in the town.

Elements of strategy that were identified as lacking by the Panel that will be key to successfully unlocking the value of Ramsgate's historic environment for its people included environment (green infrastructure), car parking and transport (including multi-mode transport e.g. park and ride), and tourism. However a community empowerment approach is also needed, both to ensure the strategy works for the community but also to ensure the community take some of the responsibility for delivering it. The Panel noted that, despite recent evidence of good progress, rifts remain not only between the District Council and community but also affect relationships between several community groups and Ramsgate Town Council. A process of mending relationships will be an important part of the strategy.

Other options the Council should consider in seeking to 'do more with less' include making use of Design South East as a design review service (paid for by developers) from which both developers and the council can benefit. Low-cost initiatives the Council could seek to support include the promotion of existing town trails through small-scale grant-aid or development of new routes that showcase the town's history and businesses. Potential material for trails might include the town's international connections (it is now the home of 1000 residents of Polish origin for example), as well as exploring connections with famous people who landed at or visited Ramsgate. The current successful promotion of the Pugin legacy stands out as a good early example of this. The Panel was impressed with the change in management by the District Council, including the time being taken by the Director of

Community Services to understand and reflect on issues rather than chasing 'quick win solutions'.

There was support from the Panel for making better provision for the fishing community within the harbour as a priority. The fishermen provide activity that can attract tourists with opportunities to upsell – nearly all of Ramsgate's catch currently goes to markets outside the local area. The harbour includes potential areas for storage and training space, as well as other opportunities related to the fishing trade. These need to be considered and, if appropriate, allocated for this purpose as soon as possible to build confidence.

Ramsgate Town Centre

The Panel was impressed with the quality of much of the town centre but could see that there is clear potential for improvement, some of which might be achieved through redevelopment but in some cases would need careful management of public space and quality through more minor changes. Ramsgate Town Centre also continues to serve its local community very much as a traditional market town centre with a traditional mixture of independent grocery and comparison goods retail alongside cafés, public houses and services, which provided a contrast with the specialist retro-shopping and restaurants offer that has developed in Margate. Protecting this traditional town centre mix of uses will be important in ensuring it continues to contribute to the sustainability of Ramsgate as a residential community, which is part of its attraction for visitors.

The Panel also identified the compact character of the town centre as a key element that contributes to this strength.

Contrast with Margate

Margate's change in fortune has required considerable investment by the District Council as well as a number of major external funders focused on a small number of substantial regeneration projects. The Panel observed that it had also required considerable persistence by the Council's conservation staff to protect buildings that were not seen as going concerns prior to the uplift in the area's economy. Given present economic circumstances, investment of the scale seen in Margate cannot be expected in Ramsgate. The considerable involvement of local community groups in Ramsgate also requires a different approach. The Panel also saw a contrast in the historic offer of each town, where Margate catered for mass 'working class' tourism, providing spectacle and noise and excitement, Ramsgate historically provided for a more genteel and exclusive experience that is better suited to the smaller and more intimate scale of its townscape.

For all of these reasons the Panel concluded that the imposition of big 'magic bullet' solutions designed to attract large numbers of visitors would risk alienating local stakeholders and fail to achieve the best value from Ramsgate's assets, which require a more subtle approach. This approach should include a clear strategy and supporting appropriate community initiatives through guidance and joint working, although the Council needs to manage expectations and avoid abortive work on clearly unviable projects. The Council could play an important supportive role by identifying common stepping stones that community groups will need to take to

access funding or gain permissions to undertake works. In some cases this might require sharing expertise such as conservation architecture or preparing a robust business model. However, the approach of protecting heritage assets until the right funding and perception of the value is in place should also be supported in Ramsgate to avoid the pursuit of quick wins resulting in unnecessary harm.

7. Analysis

7.1 Key Resources (Strengths)

Ramsgate is known within Thanet for having a particular entrepreneurial spirit of independence with business people who are willing to push the boundaries (including planning and other controls). Whilst this is challenging for the Council and in some cases needs concerted effort to demonstrate leadership for the benefit of the wider community, the Panel also recognised this could lead to innovative grass roots solutions for the area's regeneration, which the Council can encourage and build on.

The compact town centre and harbour provide an initial focus for visitors to explore, including a 'living' town centre with much charm (although also with room for improvement to undo the harm of lax planning control in recent decades). This central area can act as a springboard to the heritage assets of the east and west cliffs.

The activity of fishing and a working historic harbour is Ramsgate's key selling point as an attraction for visitors.

Unique heritage – The town is particularly notable for both its Roman Catholic and Jewish heritage, which is particularly unusual in South East England. These, along with many other aspects of the town's history and landscape, such as the Ramsgate tunnels, history of the fishing industry, history of the British Navy and wrecks, as well as marine rescue and the embarkation of troops for foreign conflicts just across the English Channel, provide opportunities for story collecting and celebration, which could be a positive means for engaging with the community and building a positive image.

Incomers – Ramsgate has always been a focus for new settlers who bring skills and ideas that create new opportunities (including the Montefiores and Pugins); this might be a story worth telling.

Natural Assets – the coastline and the sea are clearly important natural assets that have shaped the area's development and have their own heritage that can be explored from and within Ramsgate.

Educational institutions, including East Kent College – The Panel considered the opportunity to develop links between community organisations and educational institutions an important means to start providing alternative learning opportunities. These could focus on the history and modern story of innovation, represented in the harbour and use of marine resources and renewable energy, as well as the high tech businesses occupying the developing Discovery Park.

The area surrounding the town centre has extensive green spaces that provide an important resource for the health (both physical and mental) of Ramsgate's population and that make it an attractive place to live and visit.

The restructured Council is now looking at the community, planning and regeneration as intertwined.

Ramsgate has a different, but complementary offer to Margate – more 'up-market', smaller-scale and focused on the sea and interaction with it and on the town centre and its architecture and surrounding green spaces.

Walkability – It is just 1 mile from the station to the seafront.

Ramsgate clearly has strength of expertise within the community, as shown by the support for various projects including the Motor House Project.

7.2 Suggestions (Opportunities)

Perception

- Develop a 'big vision' for Ramsgate, including improving the town's self-image. Liverpool needed to go through this in the 1980s and develop a 'strap-line' that summed up its uniqueness – this might need the injection of fresh perspectives on what Ramsgate could be.
- Develop community investment organisation/arm's length company to take forward regeneration of a range of assets and achieving regeneration benefits for the community (more focused on wider regeneration than a building preservation trust).
- Develop a 'shared assets' approach to ensure wider community benefit from site-specific investments.

Funding, Resources and Infrastructure

- Mapping of assets and review of risks, maintenance/repair needs should be a priority to understand liabilities and start realising values.
- For match funding – consider borrowing against the value of one or more heritage assets, given the Council's considerable estate and currently rising property values. Rule out proposals that just aren't going to work – either for viability reasons or for planning reasons.
- Identify quick wins that meet a wide range of requirements

Working with community groups – addressing deprivation

- Walking workshops can be more participative and less confrontational than meeting in a room.
- Not all initiatives need to involve planning or physical works
- Working with the community to collect 'Ramsgate stories' may provide a means of engaging the community as well as providing material for town trails or other heritage and community initiatives.
- Working with GP Commissioning Group/Mental Health Trust to consider opportunities for community engagement to contribute to health (body and mind).

- Consider opportunities for green infrastructure projects in particular to contribute to better mental health and wellbeing.
- The Council need a group of town centre businesses, including a mix of local enterprises and 'Down From London' investors with whom to work, alongside other interest groups
- The Coastal Communities Team is providing a number of key positive initiatives but need to demonstrate accountability and representation of the community. The District Council could contribute to this by engaging more with them, alongside other stakeholders and providing support.

7.3 Issues (Weaknesses)

As part of their analysis the Panel considered areas where the management of Ramsgate's historic environment and promotion of its regenerative potential present particular key issues that should be considered in the formulation of a strategy. These included:

Strategic Direction and Infrastructure

- There are no strategies for several factors that should contribute to regeneration, such as tourism, transport and parking, green space/infrastructure, job creation and education. However, there is an opportunity to develop a 'joined-up' strategy covering these areas.
- Dedicated car parking is considered to be in the wrong locations, and either over-exploited in some places (e.g. Harbour Parade) or underused in other (Eastern Undercliff). The District Council sold the multi-storey car park under a previous administration.
- The town's main late-night taxi office is located on Harbour Street in a 'pinch-point' and has been a focus of unruly behaviour involving revellers leaving pubs and clubs late at night.
- Other areas of public realm, such as the planning of Harbour Parade, are poor and focused on motorists rather than pedestrians.

Finance and Council Resources

- The new harbour is a major cost centre for the Council requiring additional investment to secure its use as a port for bulky goods and roll-on roll-off services;
- Big heritage assets, such as the Royal Harbour, Town Centre, WWII tunnel system require significant resources to manage. The District Council need to pass some of this management burden to the community, possibly including commercial interests.
- The Council has been slow to enforce parking and planning regulations in the area and some negative behaviour, such as double-parking at Royal Parade, has become entrenched.
- The Council do not currently have a clear understanding of opportunities afforded by the heritage assets and other resources within their ownership – they own a considerable estate of heritage properties in Ramsgate, which could be an important resource.

The role of the Royal Harbour in the town's economy

- The town's fishermen are struggling to maintain their businesses as a result of a lack of storage facilities, opportunities to upsell their catch and availability of junior staff.
- The harbour area's potential as an attraction for tourists is underexploited, partly due to lack of investment in public realm, as well as lack of facilities and activity – several historic buildings in this area are unoccupied or under maintained.
- Ironically, the town now has a shortage of hotel accommodation. Whilst there are several very successful 'boutique hotels' the town needs a larger offer to support overnight stays. The Travelodge development at Royal Parade/York Street is not considered to be a good example of this type of development.
- The tourism offer for the town also needs to be extended to prevent development of a negative seasonal economy.
- There is a shortage of qualified sailing crew to support the functioning of the marina.

Perception and relationships

- The town is described as being in a collective 'mourning for the past' resulting in a lack of confidence in investment.
- The town is perceived as having a failing town centre with high vacancy rates, although this may be over-emphasised or empty units may be clustered in particular areas. It is notable that the town supports both high-end and budget shopping offers.
- Failure to support the community or effectively manage the town's heritage assets in the past has resulted in poor relationships between the District Council and local community, including suspicion of corruption. Some meetings have descended into unruly and aggressive confrontation, resulting in lost opportunities for collaboration and entrenching hostility. However, this is not unique to Ramsgate and Panel members shared their own experience of having to overcome such obstacles.
- Numerous other stakeholders are now involved in promoting the regeneration of the Town, including Town Council, Care Commissioning Group, Coastal Community Team and Town Team, in addition to private land owners, residents and businesses. There are some poor relationships between these groups making collective action more difficult and creating frustration for local people wanting to influence decision-making.
- The relationship between the District Council and County Council with regard to Transport infrastructure could be improved to secure a more 'joined-up' approach that improves potential for regeneration.

7.4 Risks (Threats)

The Panel felt there were a number of areas where a direction or area of action by the Council or other agencies could have a negative impact on the potential for Ramsgate's regeneration and the management of its historic environment. These included:

- Heritage value could be lost as a result of poorly designed schemes rushed through to achieve 'quick wins' where more time would allow better consideration of detail;
- The potential that investment in the area, including purchase and restoration of property by incomers and regeneration agencies, fails to provide benefits for the local community or contribute to tackling deprivation;
- An uncoordinated approach to regeneration results in 'pepper-potting' of funding that fails to achieve wider benefits or tackle key priorities for the conservation or enhancement of heritage assets;
- Focus on 'One big opportunity' by the District Council results in failure to support a wider number of community led initiatives, resulting in community feeling unsupported or missed opportunities to develop a more diverse and resilient economy (and community);
- In enforcing planning and parking regulations the Council is seen as being heavy-handed and preventing local entrepreneurial activity.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Summary

Ramsgate needs an agreed strategy for regeneration to guide decision-making within the Council but also as a common plan of action for disparate community groups, landowners and investors to understand how their actions will contribute to the town's renaissance. The strategy needs to involve local residents, businesses and landowners in making the decisions that will determine the town's future, including making the best use of their heritage assets.

8.2 Key Recommendations

- Develop a regeneration strategy for Ramsgate that co-ordinates activities to address themes of deprivation (health, education, worklessness) identified as affecting the focal areas of the Harbour and town centre, as well as integrating strategies for traffic, public transport and parking, green infrastructure and walking/cycling routes, tourism and heritage management.
 - The Council to provide a strategic lead for the community in developing the strategy but to facilitate a process of community planning that capitalises on Ramsgate's strong tradition of independent-minded and entrepreneurial businesses and residents.
 - The plan needs to set out a positive vision for the future that builds on the Harbour and town centre's many strengths and starts to address negative self-image, perhaps injecting fresh perspectives rather than recycling previous ideas.
 - The implementation strategy should guide Council support for key projects initiated by the community rather than imposing a single 'big project/magic bullet' approach to the town's regeneration.
 - The strategy, due to financial necessity, needs to show how responsibility for management of the Harbour and town centre's heritage assets will be shared with the community, including businesses and the voluntary sector. This also requires demonstrating how the Council will support community groups as a facilitator of

regeneration, rather than always being the active promoter. This may include providing guidance to groups on 'stepping stones' to getting projects in motion, providing assistance in accessing funding and providing more detailed technical expertise when necessary.

Improved relationships with community groups is an essential precursor if this is to succeed.

- The Council needs to consider how using its extensive estate of property in the town, including numerous historic buildings, can contribute to regeneration, including addressing deprivation.
- Regeneration of the Harbour area needs to build on the positive work of bringing activity to the arches. Reuse of the historic buildings should promote a natural tour of the Harbour area as well as activities for visitors, alongside the development of activity that supports local fishing and marine activity. Supporting the fishing industry is a priority to secure the attraction this provides for the visitor economy.
- Public realm enhancement needs to demonstrate a 'place-making' approach as well as improving pedestrian connectivity around Royal Parade, Harbour Street and Harbour Parade and the pedestrian route from the station to the High Street and Harbour Parade as a critical route to contribute to visitors' perception of Ramsgate. This might also include providing public transport hubs to support the developing visitor economy.
- The Council should raise its aspirations for design quality in new developments, making use of Design South East's design review service where appropriate.
- Where transgression of regulations is negatively affecting regeneration objectives, the TDC in conjunction with Kent County Council, need to show strong leadership through enforcement.

9. Epilogue: Tour of Margate and Review of Successes and Failures

The Panel took the opportunity briefly to revisit Margate some seven years after its main visit in 2009. The Panel observed considerable success in the past seven years, transforming the town centre from a crumbling seaside resort in retreat to a growing centre for investment with a reputation for providing 'retro-fashion' shopping and independent shopping, pubs, restaurants and cafes. The town's narrow lanes and cobbled squares are particularly notable, following investments in the public realm. They provide a positive contrast with the modern Turner Contemporary Gallery. The Panel was impressed by small-scale interventions to provide affordable housing at Love Lane, whilst the quality of maintenance or restoration of shopfronts provides a particularly important ambience to the Old Town. Margate Old Town is once again an attractive and distinctive destination for day trips from London and has a growing overnight economy with substantial investment in hotels. High Speed 1, and the presence of a destination in the Turner have encouraged strong growth in the visitor economy.

The regeneration of Dreamland, notwithstanding early difficulties over the opening of the Scenic Railway and the administration of the management company, was also seen by the Panel as a major achievement that has provided a second major

attraction. The beginning of expected take up of property by house buyers or investors from London is also already being seen with potential to contribute to lifting areas such as Cliftonville.

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