Hartlepool - A change for the better

Setting the scene

Hartlepool is in the North-East of England on the North Sea coast within the Tees Valley sub region. It serves a population of 92,600 including the town of Hartlepool and a small number of villages. It became a unitary authority in April 1996 and is the second smallest unitary in England.

Historically, the town's economy was based on the port and coal exporting trade of the nineteenth century. This gave rise to iron and steel, shipbuilding and engineering industries which continued to flourish until the second half of the last century until the decline in heavy industries such as ship building, steel fabrication and manufacturing in the 1960s and 1970s.

Within this period, the Borough's economic landscape dramatically changed with major job losses in these key industrial sectors. As a consequence, in 1985, unemployment peaked at 25%, an all time high for the Borough with 10,000 adults claiming unemployment benefits. Educational standards were very low and not improving: only around a quarter of school leavers obtained five GCSEs. The physical infrastructure of the town was in decline. There were large areas of derelict land, most notably the South Docks. Many major town centre buildings stood empty and almost one quarter of the shops in the town's only significant shopping centre were unlet. As a consequence the town suffered with a poor image both locally and nationally.

Transformation through innovation

However, Hartlepool has a long history of rising in the face of such adversity and in the past twenty-five years, the Borough has been transformed through public and private investment in regeneration including housing renewal areas and specific employment land sites. Today, Hartlepool Marina, Wynyard Business Park and Queens Meadow Business Park are widely acknowledged as flagship initiatives.

More recently the new £53m Hartlepool College of Further Education opened its doors in August 2011. Building work on the college started in October 2009. It was one of only 12 projects, out of 144, approved after a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds shortage.

Increasingly the town is a visitor destination with a wide range of retail facilities and visitor attractions. If you're interested in history of a nautical kind there's The National Museum of the Royal Navy Hartlepool to see the HMS Trincomalee,

lovingly restored by local craftsmen and the oldest warship still afloat in the UK. HMS Warrior, the Royal Navy's first Ironclad warship, was restored in Hartlepool with such a level of craft and detail that vintage ship restoration is now a firm part of the town's CV. The Quay is a life-size reconstruction of an old Napoleonic seaport complete with authentic shops and a market place. The Quay is the North East's Premier Maritime Attraction and winner of the North East Visitor Attraction of the Year 2009.

The legendary seafarer Captain Cook was born just down the coast in Marton, Middlesbrough, and visitors can learn about the route that led him to exploration by visiting 'Cook Country', passing through breathtaking countryside to Whitby, with its dramatic Abbey which was the inspiration for Bram Stoker's Dracula. To the south lies the beautiful city of York, and the lively metropolis of Leeds, whilst to the north there's historic Durham with its Cathedral or Newcastle's bustling nightlife. Closer to home people can enjoy the award winning beaches of Seaton Carew (weather permitting), the historic Headland and the restaurants and bars of Hartlepool Marina and Church Street.

The Borough continues to maintain a high profile that was significantly increased with the successful Tall Ships Race 2010, which witnessed 970,000 people visiting the Borough and provided over £20 million in revenue for the local economy.

There has been significant investment in the town. This has included the £12m plus remodeling of Dyke House Sports and Technology College, in Mapleton Road, Hartlepool, and nearly £9m allocated for ICT upgrades to all of Hartlepool's secondary schools as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme. With the new £11 Cleveland College of Art and Design currently being built at the bottom of Church Street along with a £7m redevelopment of the street this will hopefully give the area a huge lift and become a centre for innovation and skills. Prior to the recession unemployment fell to an historical low with just over 2,000 benefit claimants. Educational achievement has risen with 55.1% of school leavers getting five good GCSEs (including English and Maths) in the 2014/15 academic year.

Hartlepool is a proud close-knit community with a strong sense of identity. Nevertheless, a significant amount remains to be achieved. Hartlepool has a mixed socioeconomic environment and suffers from high levels of deprivation. Hartlepool is the 18th (out of 326) most deprived district in England, based on the rank of average scores (IMD 2015). Only half the population has a car compared to two thirds nationally. Levels of ill health and disability are above the national average, which is due in part to relatively large numbers of elderly people and to the social and economic deprivation in certain areas.

Disadvantage continues to present a major challenge to the Council. Despite massive investment and physical regeneration the continuing very high levels of social deprivation bring a number of assorted problems. In recognition, the priority which had been given to physical regeneration has been shifted over the last few years towards an agenda based on a broader approach to regeneration, with a stronger emphasis on social inclusion. However, cuts to government grants have impacted on our ability to take this work forward at the pace that we would like.

The multiple nature of the social problems experienced by a large proportion of the population means that a partnership approach, bringing together members of the community, public agencies, and other stakeholders, is essential if improvements are to be continued. Leading this partnership and continuing the drive for inward investment, bringing jobs and economic prosperity to the area will remain high priorities.

Facing the future with confidence

The global economic downturn has been very challenging for Hartlepool with large-scale redundancies pushing the claimant count up. The latest unemployment rate for Hartlepool is 3.7 for January 2016 which is a little higher than the 3.4 in December 2015 but in line with changes across the Tees Valley. The youth unemployment rate is currently 3.9% in 2015/16 which is a significant reduction on the 17.1% in 2012/13. .

Despite this many companies have continued to prove their economic resilience and are building on their strengths to position themselves to take full advantage of new and exciting opportunities. These include the eventual decommissioning and potential new build of the Nuclear Power Station, Renewable energy sectors, Oil and Gas and Chemical Industries. The allocation of EZ status to the Port, Queens Meadow and Oakesway offers an enhanced opportunity to attract companies within these targeted growth sectors. These are major opportunities which will provide the key drivers to longer term economic prosperity; creating the jobs for the future and enabling a new chapter in the economic growth of the Borough.

A good place to live

House prices are also comparatively low and, when combined with the increasingly high quality of local schools, are being seen as a great reason to relocate. There is a wide range of established and new build housing available, from a luxury apartment in the stunning marina development to a family home in the beautiful surrounding countryside.

Hartlepool is also increasingly well connected, within easy reach of major airports – Newcastle, Leeds/Bradford and Durham Tees Valley International regional airport. The A19 and the A1M, the main north/south link roads, are only 15 minutes and 30 minutes away respectively, making it an easy commute. The east coast mainline railway will whisk you to London direct from Hartlepool in just over 3 hours.

So whether you decide to commute to Hartlepool or choose to relocate it's a more attractive destination than you might imagine.