

## MAKING YOUR OPINION COUNT

There is a big difference between the letters page of the Advertiser and an informed debate progressing towards a consensus. However, it's that kind of debate that the council and other bodies need to have with members of the public interested in the future of the town.

First of all, it's important to realise that some things are outside the scope of the Local Development Framework, which is made up of decision-making documents. Areas the Council and the community have no direct control over, but might still hope to influence include:

- Which shops and businesses choose to set up in Berwick
- Transport issues – roads, railways and public-transport services
- Educational provision – mostly dealt with at County level and beyond
- The availability of 'windfall' sites – the LDF can only look at development sites that are known to be available as it is being drafted, but others will become available subsequently
- Whether property stays in local ownership or not
- Whether people maintain their property (except in the most extreme cases in conservation areas)
- Whether people spend their money with local firms



The Quayside – what kind of development would be appropriate here? How high could it be? Should the Walls be illuminated at night?

## THE REGENERATION QUESTION

### WHAT IS REGENERATION?

The Audit Commission says:

*'In some areas, problems of economic, social and environmental dereliction combine to lock local communities into a vicious cycle of exclusion. Regeneration is a response to these problems, seeking to promote prosperity and an enhanced quality of life for citizens. Regeneration involves a wide range of activity, including social inclusion, housing improvement and physical development, all realised within the context of a coherent vision for an area's future.'*

### REGENERATION OR REVITALISATION?

Although there are pockets of social exclusion in Berwick borough, the whole town is 'excluded' in terms of geography, of services and of wage levels.

The spatial decisions that have to be made for the Local Development Framework are deeply linked with questions of regeneration, especially in terms of housing, physical development, and employment and education prospects. But need for regeneration is a human issue, with psychological implications for the community – it's not possible just to build your way out of trouble.

In formulating the LDF, and aiming for a successful and thriving town rather than 'blank-eyed regeneration', it will be fundamental to try to find consensus on questions like these:

- Is concentrating on housebuilding the wisest way forward if issues connected with housing are causing problems at present?
- How can better educational prospects in the town be secured?
- Should we encourage a rise in visitors and visitor spend by providing attractions and facilities or by providing second-home properties?
- How do we offset the problems linked to seasonal work?
- How do we care for and showcase our heritage? Subtly, promoting Berwick as an unspoilt destination, or loudly, by repackaging it to compete with attractions in other towns? Is there a middle way?
- How can we ensure that we get high-quality homes, facilities and good amenity space when Spittal Point is developed? How can we promote a good mix of users (e.g. both residents and tourists)?
- Do we need regeneration or just rebalancing – an influx of population and a radical new future for Berwick or a response to the problems of those who are here already?
- What priority should the museum, archives and other cultural spaces have? Do we need a central tourist facility in the town?
- Are new transport facilities needed to help people move around the town?
- Is what's good for the community the same as what's good for the local authority – especially economically?

## THE THORNY ISSUES

When it comes to issues like these ones, it is more important than ever to ensure that the debate is as informed as possible.

### The town centre and parking

Will a new superstore harm town-centre shops or bring more consumers to Berwick? If it doesn't attract enough trade, will it try to expand in size as has happened elsewhere?



Parking has been exchanged for loading in Marygate. It's argued that there is parking availability elsewhere, but is that because people are avoiding the town centre altogether?

### The family silver

Are there parts of the historic centre that should be preserved rather than given up to residential development? In years to come, would we regret losing the garden of the Governor's House or more of the green space between Tweedmouth and Spittal?



### Buildings at risk

This Presbyterian chapel dates from 1756, and is the last remaining of three meeting houses in the centre of Berwick. Plans have been submitted to demolish it and redevelop the site, and the structure is in such disrepair that it has not been deemed worthy of listing.



### Greenfield sites and vacant brownfield ones

No studies have been done into the viability of putting the trading estates on the Ord Road to new use, yet the Council is minded to give planning permission for a supermarket and retail park on the fields opposite. In the background of the photograph is the still-derelict Pringle factory.



### Playing fields

The Newfields playing fields – and the memorable view from the bypass out to sea – are currently the subject of contentious development proposals.



### Chimneys

Heritage and local character, or eyesores evoking a difficult industrial past?



## MOST INSPIRING COMMUNITY PROJECT?



The Dewar's Lane granary is a listed (and listing!) building which is being converted to a Youth Hostel, exhibition space, café and shop through the efforts of the Berwick Preservation Trust.

## MOST EXCITING PROSPECT?



Spittal Point – enough room for a Northumberland Coast Centre and more!

## BIGGEST UNTAPPED RESOURCE?



Something like five million passengers each year get a panoramic view of Berwick between Spittal and the station. What other town in Britain enjoys free publicity like it? And how many thousands visit Holy Island, eight miles down the coast, and then turn back for home?

## A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?

For *Market Towns: Losing their Character?*, the CPRE surveyed 120 market towns in 2004.

*'The quality, character and distinctiveness of market towns and their surrounding countryside is a huge economic asset which provides opportunity and competitive advantage.'*

*'The presence of a design guide and thorough assessment of a town's infrastructure will allow market towns to develop in character without being overwhelmed. Linked to this is the need for realistic traffic management and for more consideration given to the effects any future developments may have on traffic.'*

*'Local planning policies must recognise that there are limits to the degree of development that each market town can support. They should emphasise the need for retail development to take place in the centre of town and strongly encourage the use of brownfield land for development in relation to employment.'*

*'It is always a pleasure ... to go into the modest town of Holt, in Norfolk, and see how it retains its centuries-old function as the place into which the surrounding countryside flocks to do its shopping. Streets and shops are jammed, cars come in and out, everything is smart and up-to-date, friends and acquaintances call to each other across the street.'*

*Mark Girouard, The English Town, 1990*