

UNDERSTANDING THE COASTAL COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTH WEST

**LOCAL AUTHORITY
DISTRICT SUMMARY:**

WIRRAL

JUNE 2009



Wirral contains seven of the 47 communities considered within the regional study of coastal communities across the North West¹. This summary offers a high level extract of analysis into those communities.

- **Birkenhead** makes up part of the Liverpool urban core and is located on the Wirral Peninsula directly opposite Liverpool city. Like Liverpool it exhibits many of the same socio-demographic characteristics including high levels of deprivation, large numbers of benefit claimants and lower than average house prices than the sub-region and region². Birkenhead is also part of the Port of Liverpool dock network and hosts ferry terminals transporting passengers to Dublin, Belfast, the Isle of Man and across the Mersey to Liverpool. Wirral Waters is a major proposal for residential and office development of part of the Birkenhead Docks. Currently awaiting approval, Wirral Waters would be an estimated £4.5 billion investment, creating tens of thousands of jobs during construction (which will span over at least 30 years), and hosting approximately 27,000 jobs when complete³.
- **Bromborough** is a small coastal community south of Birkenhead on the inner Mersey Estuary and like Birkenhead it has a predominantly industrial economic relationship with its coast. Given its relatively small residential population Bromborough is a significant economic centre with a strong manufacturing industry⁴. It retains 30% of its labour force and attracts a further 5,000 plus workers, mainly from Birkenhead⁵.
- **Heswall** is in direct contrast to the coastal communities on the opposite side of the Wirral Peninsula (Birkenhead, Bromborough and New Brighton). It has low levels of deprivation, high average house prices and relatively low numbers of benefits claimants⁶. It is also a big exporter of labour, mainly to Birkenhead and Liverpool. Heswall's coast is one of natural beauty and has been protected as a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area⁷.
- **Hoylake** and **West Kirby** are relatively small coastal communities located on the North East corner of the Wirral Peninsula. They are very similar in size and socio-economic characteristics. They are primarily commuter towns; hosting well-off

¹ Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West; Rural Innovation; June 2009

² See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook

³ www.peelwaters.co.uk/wirralwaters.html

⁴ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook; Sectoral Employment

⁵ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook; 2001 Travel to Work In

⁶ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook

⁷ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West (page 71)

residents who work in Liverpool or Birkenhead⁸. West Kirby's average house price is more than twice the regional average⁹. The natural beauty and tranquillity of the coast is recognised as a major asset for of these communities.

- **Moreton** sits on the northern edge of the Wirral Peninsula. It has a relatively strong manufacturing industry, employing a higher percentage of people in this sector than any other coastal community in the North West¹⁰. It shares similar socio-economic characteristics with neighbouring Birkenhead including high levels of deprivation, higher than average levels of benefit claimants and lower average house prices compared to the rest of the region. Its economic relationship with the coast is limited.
- **New Brighton** sits on the north eastern tip of the Wirral Peninsula and was once a very popular coastal resort for the region. However in recent times the community has suffered similar socio-economic issues to its neighbours Birkenhead and Moreton. In 2004 a £70 million redevelopment plan for the regeneration of New Brighton was unveiled, with the aim of bringing jobs and tourism into the area. Known as the Neptune Project, it involved filling in the Marine Lake to build a supermarket, and constructing an outdoor public swimming pool and a new marine lake. However the plans were rejected and in October 2007, the Government rejected a public enquiry into the plan. An amended plan was approved which included a Morrison's supermarket on the seafront, budget hotel and cinema. In May 2009 a detailed planning application was submitted for the second phase of the £60m regeneration scheme. The new phase will comprise of three groups of buildings housing both leisure and retail space along with associated landscaping and public realm as well as improved highways and public transport links¹¹.

Data relating to the socio-economic and environmental characteristics of each settlement can be found in the [Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook](#). This data can be brought together to provide a detailed picture for the coastal communities within Wirral. The table below records the relative performance of each settlement against a set of summary indicators. It defines the performance of each community with reference to the sub-regional average for each indicator¹².

⁸ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook; 2001 Travel to Work Out

⁹ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook; House Prices

¹⁰ See Understanding the Coastal Communities of the North West . Data Workbook; Sectoral Employment

¹¹ www.neptunedevelopments.co.uk

¹² A sub-regional rather than regional average has been used because of the significant impact of communities within Merseyside on the overall regional data. See main report, Geographic Analysis (page 6)

Community	Population	Aged Pop.	Pop Growth	Low Income	Car Ownership	Deprivation	Unemployment	Retail & Hospitality	Access to Services	Employment Centre	House Ownership	Private Rented Housing
Birkenhead	219,528	=	-	-	-	+	+	-	=	+	-	+
Bromborough	7,774	+	+	=	-	-	=	+	-	+	-	-
Heswall	29,997	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	=	-	+	-
Hoylake	11,494	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	=	-	+	-
Moreton	25,998	=	+	=	-	+	+	-	=	-	-	-
New Brighton	13,023	+	+	+	=	=	+	+	+		+	+
West Kirby	14,039	+	=	+	+	-	-	+	=	-	+	-

= about average, + more than average, - less than average
gaps indicate where Lower Super Output Area analysis was not possible for some settlements

Typology

Within the main report four typologies of coastal communities have been identified; large urban areas, working towns by the sea, maritime towns and settlements of choice¹³.

Birkenhead has been categorised as a Large Urban Area. These places share negative socio-economic characteristics including depopulation, low household incomes, high levels of benefits claimants, higher levels of deprivation, lower levels of home ownership and higher levels of lone parents with dependant children. The influence of the coast is important for these places, but there are also (arguably larger) issues characteristic of post-industrial conurbations and their regeneration. Therefore the coastal element of this community is important but will not be the only thing that defines its future. The principal issue is to ensure that the overall regeneration effort does not overlook the coast.

¹³ See main report, Functional Typology of Coastal Settlements (page 82)

West Kirkby, Hoylake and New Brighton have been categorised as Maritime Towns. These are the places where the coastal influence is most powerful. This descriptor covers a much broader range of places than the national focus on 'Seaside Towns' has so far allowed. Maritime Towns have at some point been defined by a functional / economic relationship with the sea. Their future will be heavily influenced by the coastal features which have and continue to attract people and businesses to them. They can be resorts or ports, and are frequently both. Policy relating to Maritime Towns should regard their coastal location as a core issue, and understand the challenges and opportunities that it provides.

Bromborough and Moreton are categorised as Working Towns by the Sea. These are places which cannot be described as seaside resorts or retirement communities. They no longer have a dominant economic link with the coast and lack the type of infrastructure which typifies coastal settlements - harbours, promenades and beaches. These communities share socio-economic characteristics with inland settlements, yet proximity to the sea still makes up an important element of their character. Future policy affecting Working Towns by the Sea should seek to ensure that the benefits offered by their particular types of coastal location are not overlooked, but will not place their coastal location centrally in their futures.

Heswall has been categorised as a Settlement of Choice. These are popular communities made even more attractive by the high quality environment of their coastal location. They have a strong link to the sea and have often developed around their role as a harbour or haven. The coastal location of these settlements is a very real asset yet it risks prejudicing their future as sustainable communities . both in terms of low carbon living and the balance and vibrancy of their population and business stock. These communities tend not to have structural social economic problems requiring bold intervention. Instead they need gentle but positive management to ensure they remain relatively balanced communities able to meet the obligations of sustainable living.

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