Have your say on the future of your local area
Mercury House, Willoughton Drive, Foxby Lane Business Park, Gainsborough, DN21 1DY

October 22nd: 10.00am until 12.00pm

This summary highlights the main topics discussed at the event. They are the views of those present at the event and are not the views of Lincolnshire County Council or West Lindsey District Council.

1 Present
Professor Andrew Atherton (facilitator), Bryn Davies, Rachael Townsend, Barbara Adlington, John Cawdell, Vanessa Maunder, Emma Tatlow, Mia Kruger-Munton, Marina Di Salvatore, Will Bedford, Eleanor Bowker, Trevor Drury, Lisa Walton

The big questions we are asking:
- What is going on in the local economy where you live and work?
- What are the important issues we need to be focused on?

2 The big issues
There was a feeling that expectations in Gainsborough are lower than in many parts of the county and hence there is a large benefits dependency culture. Although bus links are improving there is a sense that Gainsborough is isolated from other parts of the county which means it is still difficult for those looking for work, and for employers in Gainsborough who wish to attract employees.

Public transport and the general infrastructure of the area is a barrier to development. The bridge over the River Trent creates a considerable bottleneck for the town.

Delegates acknowledged that the population is ageing but also indicated that the number of young people is falling significantly, and will result in a big drop in school children during the next few years. The Grammar School, however, continues to enrol students in great numbers and that is expected to continue.

There was concern about the area's inability to attract private investment, and delegates questioned whether it has the appropriate profile to appeal to investors. The number of manufacturing companies in the area is still relatively high but is falling as a proportion of the economy. When asked to vote delegates indicated that the biggest issue was the lack of private investment coming into the area. Other issues included the low expectations
in the area and the large numbers in receipt of out work benefits, the need for a dual carriageway bridge over the River Trent, and for more manufacturing units in the area.

**Biggest issue:**

![Bar chart showing the biggest issues (Lack of private investment, Expectations lower, Bridge over Trent, Manufacturing)]

**Second biggest issue:**

![Bar chart showing the second biggest issues (Dependency Culture, Lack of private investment, Expectations lower, Bridge over Trent)]

3 **The Big picture**

Bryn Davies gave a short presentation highlighting the key socio-economic data for the area. The delegates agreed that the data was correct and that it reflected what was happening in the Gainsborough area.
4 The Economy

There was a feeling that Gainsborough is not the easiest of places to start a new business, with little support from existing businesses for development and this can give the impression of a “closed economy”.

At the moment there is more interest in starting a business. However, these are likely to be sole traders and not likely to generate the significant business growth that the area needs. Many of the new ventures are lifestyle businesses but there is some optimism that there will be opportunities as regeneration activities develop along the waterfront in the town. However, some of the regeneration to date had not been successful in marked contrast to the Marshall’s Yard development.

There is a need for more land to be made available for development; an example cited was the largely redundant former RAF Binbrook site. The need for larger manufacturing companies was emphasised leading to better paid employment which would give the local economy a boost. Some questioned whether planning regulations were flexible enough to attract quality investment, but it was agreed that more funds should be sought from local and central government to attract businesses to the area.

When asked to vote delegates felt that the need for business growth was the key issue, followed by incentives to work and invest in the area, more business start ups, and greater engagement of local businesses in economic development.

What are the top business issues?

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5 Jobs

There was a perception that the economy was growing and that there had been more private sector jobs created, although many of these posts are part-time and mainly in the retail and social care fields. Vacancies are slightly up on the corresponding period last year. However, there was considerable concern that the potential job losses in the public sector after the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) could negate this growth. Overall delegates were optimistic that the jobs market would improve over the coming year.

Some expressed satisfaction with the way that West Lindsey District Council were shaping their policies towards businesses, but were worried that the CSR would have a knock on effect with the loss of public sector contracts for local companies.

As often is the case in areas of high unemployment there is a skills mismatch. The low levels of skills in the area make it difficult for companies to recruit and there is a shortage of candidates for technical and senior management positions. As a result a number of organisations have no choice but to recruit nationally.

There was also concern that there was too much of a benefits dependency culture in the areas. This creates a climate of apathy and it was essential that incentives need to be introduced to encourage people to improve their basic skills and return to the workplace.

There are some attractive parts of the town and the area in general that are open to tourism development. However, this largely depends on how Gainsborough develops as a liveable town. At the moment many of the people who work in the town commute from other parts of the county and beyond.
To attract visitors the town would need quality restaurants, hotels and retail attractions. Without this infrastructure it will be difficult to market the area as a viable tourist attraction.

**What will happen to job market over the next year or two?**

![Job Market Chart]

6 **Homes and Housing**

The impact of growth point status should boost the housing market but it was argued that some investment is also needed to renovate older buildings in the town.

One delegate expressed concern that families and young people were not financially literate enough, and this was a problem which has impacted greatly on the local housing market. Some wondered whether literacy of this nature has enough of a profile in the school curriculum, and/or whether local authorities/third sector organisations could help alleviate such problems.

It is acknowledged that a house building programme would boost the economy, and Gainsborough College are increasing the intake of construction students to ensure that local labour can take advantage of such opportunities.

However, some felt that there was a lack of green spaces in the town and a lack of play areas and general leisure facilities. It was noted that the Trent Valley were making their facilities available to local groups of societies and bookings had increased significantly over the last year.

It was also stressed that whilst housing developments should be welcomed it was also important to work to ensure that employment opportunities are made...
available. Any such developments should help to improve the infrastructure of the town and again there is a great opportunity to develop the Waterfront.

However, most delegates were of the opinion that the housing market would improve in the near future.

**Over the next 3 or 4 years the homes and housing market will get...?**

![Survey Chart]

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7  **What are the top five community issues?**

Whilst some felt that there was a lack of community spirit in the area there were also examples of successful community projects. Many of these were of the type that the government’s Big Society would resonate with. Trinity Arts Centre was an excellent example of how volunteers had driven what is now a very successful project hosting a range of different acts and groups. The Young and Safe project in Gainsborough and the activities in Trent Valley Academy were also mentioned.

Volunteering was on the increase in the town and some felt that far too few of those currently living on benefits were engaged in the activity. This would be a way of enhancing skills and experience to make them more appealing to potential employers. This type of activity was also thought to be attractive to the growing number of elderly people who simply wanted to keep active and make some form of contribution in their local communities.

With the loss of so many pubs and social clubs across the county it will be necessary for these to be replaced by community spaces of some sort. That being said it must be recognised that whilst this type of community project might have been supported by public funding in the past, it is unlikely to be as easily obtainable in the years ahead.
There are other barriers to developments as there are many in the community who might wish for the status quo whilst others wish for radical changes. Delegates also appealed to local planners to speed up the decision making process.

Some felt that the procedures were designed to kill off any innovative proposals, by stalling applicants, in the hope that any interest for the development wanes.

Overall delegates were firmly of the opinion that community would improve over the next year or so.

**Will the community get…..?**

![Chart showing community improvement preferences]

**8 If you could change one thing to improve the area, what would it be?**

To conclude delegates were asked to nominate one thing they would like to change if they had sufficient power in the community. These were:-

- Bring at least two new businesses to the area, each with in excess of 200 employees. These should be businesses that require different skills so that the economy is less vulnerable if one of the sectors began to suffer.
- Build a new dual carriageway bridge in the town.
- There was also a desire to see the A15 and the A631 duelled.
- Develop a Gainsborough identity.
- The availability of ultra-high speed broadband.
• Promote existing businesses/success stories

• Demolish any large derelict or empty buildings in the town to create green spaces.

• Develop the Waterfront **properly.**

• Make the Gainsborough Old Hall the UK’s 29th World Heritage Site.

When asked to vote on the above the highest priority, by some distance, was the desire to attract a large (200+ employees) into the area. This was followed by the dualling of the bridge into Gainsborough, developments to the waterfront in the town, better roads in and out of Gainsborough, high speed broadband, and the Gainsborough Old Hall becoming a new UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Highest Priority**

![Bar Chart](chart.png)
Lincolnshire County Council, in partnership with the Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce, runs a quarterly economic survey providing businesses with a regular update of local economic conditions. If you are not already doing so, would you like to participate in the survey via email and receive regular briefings? If so please email rachael.townsend@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Thank you to all those who attended the event, and for all your useful contributions. Please feel free to contact the Lincolnshire Research Observatory (LRO) with any questions or queries you may have.