Have your say on the future of your local area
Sleaford Council Chamber, at Sleaford
29th September 2010, 10.00am – 12.00pm

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

1 Present


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

The population of Sleaford has grown significantly over the last few years. Sleaford is an attractive and safe place to live, however this growing population is putting a strain on the local infrastructure. The relatively low house prices in the county have attracted residents from all over the country. As a result house prices have risen and affordability is now a big issue.

The current road layout in the town is causing traffic congestion (particularly during the school terms), and along with the high cost of parking may deter people from coming to Sleaford. Outside the town the lack of public transport, particularly the bus service, is a big problem in the area.

The retail offer is very accessible but under developed and now very limited. Curry’s have just closed an outlet in the town centre.

As in many parts of the county the lack of facilities for teenagers was seen as a problem. It was pointed out that for a town of this size there were three excellent, soccer, rugby and cricket clubs.

There is a need for better information about the town; the closure of the tourist information centre has had a bad effect on Sleaford.
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 broadly reflected what was happening in the Sleaford Zone.

4  **The economy**

On the positive side it was agreed that the quality of a life is a plus in this area compared to many other urban areas. Most agreed that whilst the short term may be difficult (18 months) the outlook for the next 3 or 4 years could be ‘quite rosy’.

Concerns were raised about the level of skills in the area. Middle managers in particular are difficult to recruit as graduates and skilled professionals tend to leave the area to pursue their careers, although some return later on in their working lives. There is also a lack of apprenticeship opportunities for younger people in the area which could help to reduce the number of unemployed young people.

Competition is intense and this is putting pressure on profit margins for local businesses. There was concern that the expected cuts in public expenditure could push many small businesses in the area “over the edge”. However, there are very few large businesses in the area and as a result Sleaford has been able to resist the worst effects of the economic downturn. Agriculture sector could be very profitable if wheat prices remain high following the summer drought in Russia.

Local businesses should look to use local suppliers where possible; however, this is not always the easiest or most sensible option. There are fears that the proposed Tesco development could impact negatively on Sleaford High Street.

When asked to vote delegates indicated that the increased population and the proposed Tesco developments were the most important issues, followed by housing affordability and the lack of retail outlets in the town centre. Delegates also indicated that they expected economic conditions to get slightly worse in the next year.

**What are the top five business issues?**

![Bar chart showing the top five business issues: Population, Tesco, Housing affordability, Retail, Activities for teens, Tourist info]
Over the next year will the business environment...

5 The jobs market

The rural economy is suffering and there is a distinct lack of employment opportunities outside Sleaford. It is recognised that many people in this zone commute to Lincoln to work.

There was concern about the future for young people but some queried whether the education system was equipping young people for the workplace. There was a feeling that very few would have the skills or the aptitude to start a new business.

There were concerns that the local economy could be badly hit if the forthcoming reduction in public expenditure was to affect any of the local RAF bases. The on-line economy is having an impact upon local shops, and some questioned whether local retailers are sufficiently skilled to take advantage of this development.

When asked to vote the delegates expect a clear worsening of the jobs market over the next year or so.

Is the job market getting going to get...?
6 The homes and housing market

There has been a great deal of house building in the Sleaford area and there was concern that the local infrastructure might be at breaking point. House prices have risen sharply and it is difficult for local people to get on to the housing ladder but it was recognised that the housing was subject to market forces.

Concern was expressed about the ageing population in rural areas where services are disappearing and this could potentially create problems for the future. Many might have downsized to release capital only to realise that life in isolated rural villages has its own challenges. In such situations it may leave older people feeling trapped and isolated.

Despite these concerns delegates feel that the housing market will not deteriorate over the next few years, but they do not see housing becoming any more affordable.

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

Over the next 3-4 years will housing become more affordable?
Over the next 3-4 years will housing become more available?

- Less available
- More available
- About the same

7 What are the top five community issues in this area?

Sleaford has declined as a market town over the last few years, and there was a noticeable decline after the closure of the cattle market. Subsequently the Monday market has declined considerably and the town is no longer as much of a local hub to its hinterland. The monthly farmers market is a draw but not on the same scale as the previous cattle market.

There were fears expressed about the long term sustainability of the town and the surrounding rural areas. Day to day needs can be satisfied locally but many residents now shop in Lincoln, Grantham and further a field. Current lifestyles suggest that this pattern is increasing which is likely to hit the rural economy.

Access to health services is becoming a problem, particularly, the hospital in Grantham which is the nearest for residences in Sleaford area. This is desperately in need of upgrading.

A further problem is the lack of a large community space in Sleaford, for concerts, conferences etc, but it is accepted that it will be difficult to achieve in the current climate. Broadband speed is also an issue in the area particularly in the more rural parts.

When asked to vote on the most important community issue, rural services and isolated village economies were of greatest concern, followed by access to health care, and the demise of Sleaford as a hub to its hinterland.
Biggest priority

- Rural services: 40%
- Isolated village economies: 20%
- Market, local hub: 10%
- Access to healthcare: 10%

Second biggest priority

- Isolated village economies: 40%
- Access to healthcare: 20%
- Market, local hub: 10%
- Community space: 5%
- Rural services: 5%
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

We would like to thank those who attended the event and for all their helpful contributions. Please feel free to contact the Lincolnshire Research Observatory (LRO) with any questions or queries you may have.