

CHAPTER 3: What is Distinctive about East Sussex?

East Sussex has a population of just over half a million and covers an area of 1725 square kilometres (666 square miles), 64% falling within two nationally designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The county comprises the Boroughs of Eastbourne and Hastings, and the Districts of Lewes, Rother and Wealden.



Local Distinctiveness

Many people in East Sussex identify most strongly with their local neighbourhood, village, parish, town, district or borough. Each of these has a distinct history, community and identity and with it, distinctive strengths, problems and opportunities. There are also considerable differences within and between each of these local places. It is important to understand these differences, the different patterns of life and influence our neighbourhoods, villages, market towns and urban centres have on each other and on the county as a whole, as well as the influences of places located outside the county, such as Brighton, Kent and London.

We have many strengths including our natural environment, open spaces, countryside and coast; vibrant towns and villages with many and varied cultural activities, a mild southern climate, although this is changing, and a good location in relation to Crawley/Gatwick, Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells, Ashford, London and Europe via the ferry port at Newhaven.

Against this however are a number of challenges including:

- Poor transport and communication infrastructure
- A lack of affordable housing in urban and rural areas

- Poor access to services in some rural areas
- Coastal towns and economies in need of regeneration
- Low wages, skills and aspirations and high part-time employment
- Few high earners in East Sussex, most working outside the county
- An ageing population with an increasing demand for services
- Poor health, high rates of long term limiting illness in some areas
- Significant areas of poverty and of deprivation
- A weak local economy, dominated by small businesses employing fewer than 10 people, with lack of space in which to grow
- Flood risk in some rural and coastal areas
- Social issues, including crime and social change.

A County of Extremes

East Sussex is a county of extremes. Whilst the landscape is predominantly rural in character, nearly three quarters of the population live in urban areas (58% live in the coastal urban areas and a further 18% live in market towns). Four of our five urban centres are located on the coast, of which Eastbourne and Hastings are the largest and most densely populated. As noted in the Government's review of Sub-Regional Economic Development and Regeneration, there are major differences between the mainly urban coastal strip and the mainly rural inland areas.

The coastal strip has suffered from the decline in UK tourism, poor housing stock and a low wage economy focussed around tourism, public services and the care industry. Rural areas and market towns have also suffered a decline in traditional rural industries and some are struggling to maintain basic services and facilities, such as local shops and public transport, that those in urban areas may take for granted.

A general impression of affluence masks the fact that East Sussex is the 7th most deprived county in England out of 34 counties (excluding unitaries), with many people experiencing poverty and deprivation. Nearly 67,000 of all the county's residents are 'income deprived' while just under 25,000 adults experience 'employment deprivation'. According to the latest official estimates, around 80% of the super output areas in East Sussex now have a worse ranking for multiple deprivation relative to other areas than they did three years ago.

However, it is not yet clear how far some of these changes may be due to the ways deprivation is measured or because conditions have been improving more rapidly elsewhere.

The majority of the most deprived areas are in the coastal strip: the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) showed that 15 of the 327 Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the county were among the 10% most deprived in England. This represents nearly 5% of the county's SOAs and is two more than in 2004. Fourteen of these 15 most deprived SOAs are in Hastings; the other one is in Eastbourne. Hastings' national rank has declined from 39 in 2004 to 29 today - moving it from amongst the 20% most deprived local authority areas in England to the 10% most deprived category. Hastings remains the most deprived local authority area in the region. Hastings SOAs that are in the most deprived 10% nationally are most concentrated in Central St. Leonard's, Castle and Gensing, but 5 other wards in the borough are affected.

In many rural areas affluence exists alongside, and therefore often disguises, the deprivation that exists in the rural districts of East Sussex, for example, but not exclusively, in Hailsham in Wealden and near Rye in Rother (in Eastern Rother ward), with areas in Wealden ranking amongst the 20% most deprived, and in Rother (excluding Bexhill) ranking within the 30% most deprived. Deprivation in our urban areas (Hastings, Eastbourne, Bexhill, Newhaven and Hailsham) is long term, deeply rooted and hard to tackle. This concentration is a result of cause and effect – educational and skills standards, poor housing conditions, poor health, and lower life expectancy in these areas. However, we recognise that we must also tackle rural deprivation.

It too is long-standing, and, given its dispersed nature, challenging to address, with additional aspects such as isolation and transport and access difficulties. In addition to extremes of deprivation there are a number of other significant differences within the county. According to the Audit Commission area profiles website:

- The percentage of the population that are within 20 minutes travel time (urban - walking; rural - driving) of a range of 3 different sports facility types, at least one of which has achieved a quality mark ranges from 0% in Eastbourne to 68.8% in Lewes

- Affordable dwellings completed as a percentage of all new housing completions ranged from 0.7% in Lewes and 3.9% in Eastbourne to 21.6% in Hastings and 25.6% in Wealden
- The percentage of land and highways assessed as having unacceptable levels of litter and detritus ranges from 6.7% in Rother to 22.6% in Hastings.
- Violent offences committed per 1,000 population ranges from 10.14 in Wealden, 16.75 in Lewes to 34.84 in Hastings.

According to the latest statistics compiled on East Sussex in Figures, the number of Job Seeker's allowance claimants in January 2008 ranged from 609 in Wealden to 1,859 in Hastings.

A Changing Population

One of the biggest challenges we face is an ageing population. We also need to provide young people with enough opportunities, jobs and affordable housing to enable them to stay in the county. In some rural areas young people are often unable to continue living in the same community they grew up in if they aspire to home-ownership or seek rented accommodation that they can afford. We believe this affects migration within the county (e.g. from rural to urban areas), and migration of young people out of the county. Some of our urban areas lack the better paid career opportunities that would keep the brightest of our young people.

Inward migration is another factor in our population change. Without it the population would be falling as there are more deaths than births. Those moving into the county include: the elderly, to retire; older adults, pre-retirement; families looking for a better quality of life, who then commute; economic migrants from accession countries and, to some extent, second home owners.

Those moving out of the county include young adults - we are losing our 16-29s, generally those with higher educational and skills attainment are leaving for better career opportunities or going away to university, becoming high achievers, taking their best earning and spending years elsewhere and not returning. We also lose some older people who return to their families or retire abroad.

The population will continue to change over the next twenty years – there will be a growing number of older and very elderly people, an increasingly diverse community and increasing inward migration. This change will have a number of effects and service providers will need to adapt, for example there will need to be a wider range of housing options as single occupiers, especially the elderly, increase.

Moving Within and Around East Sussex

The reasons people move around the county are many and varied. People are influenced by what they want to do, where services are located, and how easy it is to get there. There are less than 19 miles of dual carriageway in the county, 0.95% of the total road network, and no motorways. The main roads (A21, A22 and A23) are radial from London to the coast. Getting across the county is difficult with the A259 and A27 entirely inadequate for the volume of traffic they carry.

The inadequacy of trunk roads in East Sussex has a detrimental impact on the condition of our road network, where vehicles often use local roads to avoid congested sections of the trunk road network, particularly at peak travel times. There is also limited public transport in some areas and cross county services can be poor. In particular there has been under-investment in rail which is reducing the contribution this mode can make to inter-urban travel, although there are possible improvements to rail services including re-instituting the Uckfield to Lewes line and high speed rail services to London.

The main movements are:

- Between rural areas, market towns and urban centres for work, shops and services, such as to Lewes as a centre employment with the major public sector employers – County Hall, Sussex Police, Primary Care Trusts
- Between Eastbourne and Hastings as larger urban areas offering more, and cheaper housing, employment opportunities, and access to services, cultural and leisure facilities
- To and from the Eastbourne-Hailsham Triangle area
- To Brighton, Gatwick and London for employment
- To Brighton for shopping, culture and leisure
- Along the Brighton - Lewes - Eastbourne corridor

- Along the railway lines to London with larger numbers of commuters the further up the line you travel i.e. in the north of Rother and Wealden.

East Sussex has a divided economy with the majority of people working within 5 km of their place of employment or at home. Levels of commuting to areas that offer better employment and career opportunities are dictated by the ease of access particularly by rail. This is evidenced by the significant number of people who live in the north and west of the county and commute to London or Gatwick.

East Sussex and Beyond

East Sussex is in the South East region of England - a large area with a population of over 8 million people, located between West Sussex, Surrey, Brighton and Hove and Kent, and within commuting distance of London. As mentioned above, there are numerous differences within the county, and even within the different Districts and Boroughs in the county. When taken as a whole, East Sussex also experiences a range of inequalities when compared to the rest of the South East region and nationally for example:

East Sussex has the highest levels of deprivation of all the counties in the South East. In East Sussex, 5% of Super Output Areas (SOA) are in the most deprived 10% nationally, compared to just 2% for the South East as a whole. Similarly, 10% of the East Sussex SOAs are in the most deprived 20% nationally, compared to 6% in the South East. Of the 95 SOAs in the South East ranked in the most deprived 10%, more than one in seven is located in Hastings. Across the greater South East, it appears that southern and eastern counties have fared worst over the last 3 years, with Essex, Kent and West Sussex also falling in the national rankings.

East Sussex has a large number of micro and small to medium sized businesses. Fewer people work for companies that employ 100 people or more; average full-time weekly wages are lower than the regional and national averages; there are fewer jobs per person, and unemployment is higher.

Around 10% of the population have no qualifications, this is slightly higher than anywhere else in the South East, and average GCSE attainment is lower than the England average. There are more residents of working age who are not working because, for example, they are caring for relatives, sick

or disabled than the rest of the region; and East Sussex remains one of the lowest Gross Value Added (GVA) contributors to the South East economy.

There are a number of environmental and climate change challenges: Some of our communities, businesses and infrastructure are at risk from flooding and drought. Our transport infrastructure, critical to enable people to access work and services such as health and education is poor. We have fewer trunk roads than any other county in the region, and no motorways. We also have a large sparsely populated rural hinterland, which makes decent and viable public transport coverage in rural areas difficult.

Housing is also a significant challenge: Local people have to borrow up to 8.5 times the average county salary to buy an average priced home in the county, compared to a regional average of 8.0 and a national average of 6.9 times the average salary. The level of people classed as homeless is above the national average.

East Sussex has the highest percentage of very elderly (85+) residents of any county in England. We have comparatively fewer people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BME), and more disabled working age residents than England and the South East. In terms of health: average life expectancy is higher, more adults are estimated to eat healthily and fewer are obese than the national average. However, there are more road injuries and deaths and more people are admitted to hospital for specific alcohol related conditions than the national average. Hastings, which is the most deprived district in the South East, suffers some of the greatest health problems and also has the lowest sports participation rate in the South East.

These, and other, issues are tackled in more detail in the following sections.