



Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities

Uncorrected oral evidence: Regenerating Seaside Towns

Tuesday 27 November 2018

3.15 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Bassam of Brighton (The Chairman); Baroness Bakewell; Lord Grade of Yarmouth; Lord Knight of Weymouth; Lord Bishop of Lincoln; Lord Lucas; Lord McNally; Lord Mawson; Lord Shutt of Greetland; Lord Smith of Hindhead; Baroness Valentine; Baroness Whitaker; Baroness Wyld.

Evidence Session No. 15

Heard in Public

Questions 129 - 136

Witnesses

I: Alex de Rijke, Director, dRMM; Gary Young, Partner, Farrells; Andy Murdoch, Director (Cities), Buro Happold Engineering.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither Members nor witnesses have had the opportunity to correct the record. If in doubt as to the propriety of using the transcript, please contact the Clerk of the Committee.
3. Members and witnesses are asked to send corrections to the Clerk of the Committee within 14 days of receipt.

Examination of witnesses

Alex de Rijke, Gary Young and Andy Murdoch.

Q129 **The Chairman:** Good afternoon. I think you are safely settled in. I welcome you to our evidence session. We are very grateful to you for coming along this afternoon. I am sure we will find something very useful from it.

You should have in front of you a list of interests that have been declared by members of the Committee. I should remind you that the meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website, and that a transcript of it will be published on the Committee's website. You as witnesses will have the opportunity to make corrections as and where necessary.

We are on a divisible set of amendments today and it is quite likely that there will be a Division. That being the case, I shall adjourn the Committee. If you are prepared to stay with us, that would be most helpful. We will probably reassemble within 10 or 15 minutes.

Do colleagues have anything they want to declare?

Lord Lucas: I should declare that I know Buro Happold well. I have worked with them, although there is no money involved.

Baroness Valentine: I should declare that I am in discussion with Terry Farrell about helping me with a social innovation campus in Blackpool.

Lord Mawson: I should declare that I know the architect Sir Terry Farrell.

Q130 **The Chairman:** I can declare that I do not know any of you.

It falls to me to ask the first question, which is a general one. Would you try to identify the challenges associated with creating developments on the seafront generally and in seaside towns in particular?

Alex de Rijke: In a nutshell, while it is possible to raise capital funding, it is much harder for those projects to receive ongoing support given the high maintenance required to maintain structures in very bad weather conditions. Depending on the scheme's business plan, the type of turnover and the footfall, the classic scenario of restoration or reconstruction capital being possible can be followed by another decline.

Gary Young: If I could look at the wider context, a lot of seaside towns developed during a time when the accommodation provided suited the time and a different type of use of the town for leisure. They are often in areas of natural beauty with the presence of the sea and coastline beaches, so development itself is constrained in a very significant part. Quite often, it has taken place one street back from the seafront with new developments, such as shopping. Therefore, you end up with almost a double front to the town. You have the historic front, and the aspect of what to do with it when it is exposed to weather has always been a challenge.

Quite often, those have become slightly derelict and less intensively used, so that is the context in which investment in a sense is challenged. There are a few examples where people have acquired sufficient of that land to make a go at a composite scheme—for example, in Folkestone—but often the lack of ability to do things incrementally because of the scale of the challenge facing the seafront is larger than people perceive in an insular town.

Andy Murdoch: I would like to comment on the point Gary just made. Seaside towns owe their existence largely to the seaside. As a consequence they have tended to develop in semicircles from the origin. You end up with what is effectively half a town, which is the end of the line.

What was an asset has become part of the challenge. Attracting people and building up economic activity around what could be described as an incomplete town at the end of the line is a big challenge.

Often, sea defences have been introduced in a one-dimensional way—building a wall along the front to keep out the sea—and have resulted in people being cut off from the main asset to which the city or town owes its existence. There needs to be a softer approach in treating that relationship between the sea and seaside town with the appropriate sensitivity to maximise that asset.

Lord McNally: Will you give an example of where you think that has been well done?

Andy Murdoch: One of the projects in which we have been involved is Folkestone. Farrells has been involved as well. Funding was in place for improving sea defences, and Roger De Haan saw a development opportunity to bring the harbour area into better use.

Through that there has been a much more sensitive, holistic approach to how to deal with coastal erosion as well as overtopping of the wall. Beaches have been restored in a way that dissipates waves and mitigates the risk of wave action imposing itself on that part of the town. It has created the opportunity to bring it into more productive use through that private partnership arrangement.

The Chairman: I have in my head a follow-up question that I would like to pursue. I am blessed with the thought that seaside towns have a special problem in the sense that, while they are, as we recognised, only 180 degrees, very often they have two focal points: the seafront and a city or town centre. It is like a double stress or pull for them. What concerns me most, perhaps because I have been involved in seaside towns for most of my life in one way or another, is whether we are investing enough in the long-term infrastructure of seaside towns. Are we investing at a sufficient rate to ensure that good-quality infrastructure is maintained and that we make them attractive places as part of the public realm?

Gary Young: We can continue to explore the example just referred to: Folkestone seafront. Folkestone benefited from the £11 billion spent on HS1. The point you are making is very valid. A seafront town has duality: it has a town to support and it has presence on the sea. It is challenging because that doubles your frontage. It is an opportunity, but it is a challenge.

The train infrastructure for the majority of seafront towns has not really been pushed forward, because of the lower catchment. It is a fluke that a couple of towns such as Folkestone are on a through route and have benefited from that infrastructure. Phenomenal investment has kick-started people's confidence, similar to other Kent towns that have been part of Javelin, again on the back of huge national investment.

Interestingly, other towns such as Blackpool or Scarborough existed because the people of Yorkshire wanted to travel to the west coast to holiday and people from the west coast wanted to go to the east coast, but the train services are pretty poor, compared with those from London to the south-east.

That inability to get infrastructure spending to drive regeneration means you have the double whammy of a complex town with two fronts needing more infrastructure spend at a higher national level to generate it, which has happened in a couple of towns.

Alex de Rijke: I largely concur and offer the example of the difference between adjacent seaside towns—for example, Brighton and Hastings, where I was architect of the pier. I worked on it for about seven years. From 2010, every time I went by train—every week—it was a long journey and was often delayed. When I arrived I would walk through the centre to the pier and pass the site of dereliction: needles in shop doorways and closed businesses.

The project happened slowly. We were able in a way to make the impossible happen, given the pier was a privately owned structure, through the local authority obliging the landlord, who had neglected to maintain it, making it unsafe and it burnt. There was a compulsory purchase order and the council was able to sell it to a charity that consisted of very active local supporters: Friends of the Pier.

During that time I noticed that a lot of people in London were dismayed by the cost of housing and were investing in the coast, but they would not go to Hastings because the connection was poor and it would be difficult to maintain their jobs in London in order to buy something there. It is one of those towns that escapes that investment, but it might not be what it needs.

When the pier was successfully rebuilt and reopened, I was surprised by the significant confidence it gave local businesses—if the impossible had happened, anything could. Many smaller businesses opened and continue to do so, and there is investment in the seafront. That does not rely on London money but is local regeneration from community groups and

organised investment within the town—largely the same people who initiated the pier project.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: But the pier went bust, did it not?

Alex de Rijke: Tragically, it did. The charity managing it was not used to running a business. It did not do it well and made a loss in the first year. Quite abruptly and mysteriously, it was sold by the administrator to a private individual for allegedly a very small amount of money in relation to the large amount of public money that went into its reconstruction.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: It was £11.4 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Alex de Rijke: Correct.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: Do you think that would have been better spent on the shops and empty offices that you had to walk past each day?

Alex de Rijke: I do not think so because the pier remains a symbol that will very much outlast the temporary and dubious private ownership it has fallen into. It represents not only a symbol but a very large, useful public space. I think smaller businesses still work off the back of it.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: There has been an improvement in Hastings as a result of the pier, even in its new state.

Alex de Rijke: Yes, and plenty of footfall as a result. I am talking about tourism as well.

Gary Young: May I pick up that point?

The Chairman: I am keen to pursue the second point of our questioning. Lord Shutt probably has something to add to the point teased out earlier by Lord McNally.

Q131 **Lord Shutt of Greetland:** May we look at success? What are the successes in buildings, monuments or whatever that have played a key role in a regeneration project? You have been talking about something very big, but are there perhaps smaller things where, because of them, other things have happened and regeneration has got going?

Gary Young: I have been doing research on a couple of projects in which Farrells has been involved over the decades I have worked with it. One of the big success stories has been The Deep in Hull—an aquarium that was funded by the National Lottery and finished in 2002. It is a successfully running charitable organisation that is very popular. It runs off its own revenue.

There are occasions when you can find a gap in the national profile and major landmark visitor attractions can fit into a place well. The success is not just it as an entity; it is the fact that Hull achieved the status of City

of Culture in 2017. There has been a great change of negativism to positivism in the past decade in Hull.

That has been recorded by the University of Liverpool in a very interesting read called "Impact 18". It studies the effect of the European City of Culture, which status Liverpool achieved in 2008, and how it has changed the percentage of negative news into positive news. It has influenced the way people think about their city, and globally the way the rest of the world thinks about a city.

You cannot underestimate how important that is. While those two projects were based on big landmarks—the Tate moving to Liverpool and The Deep in Hull—it is now recognised that you can begin to achieve this in a way that Alex has described by doing small things and having a creative foundation formed around a project.

That is again what has happened in Folkestone. The creative foundation was formed when the seafront development was created by the investor Roger De Haan, and it is a charity with a £2 million turnover that supports local businesses. It has purchased 80 properties; it has media-related creative activities, and it is looking for more space.

For example, it has just become involved in the thing we have all seen on the news, Pages of the Sea, where local people created sand sculptures on 11 November. Folkestone was one of the initiators. This is the sort of thing that captures people's imagination; it transforms, and the regeneration is part of the self-image.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: In your first answer you talked about insular towns. Were you referring to a mindset or just to the geography? Are you saying that small projects can shift mindset and generate more local sustainable investment?

Gary Young: I was referring to geography initially—the fact that seafront towns are more outward looking—but the approach taken by these initiatives creates the sense of purpose and pride, which, when it was a port or a fishing community, had been lost. Therefore, you regain it by being creative, if you follow the logic.

Baroness Wyld: On the point about purpose and pride, you mentioned local people. I can see people getting involved in cultural initiatives, but can you think of any tangible examples where, hand on heart, you can say that a regeneration project has had a direct impact on the lives of local people, in particular those experiencing the social problems we have heard about: mental health and educational underattainment? Are there any sterling examples of regeneration helping with that?

Alex de Rijke: I can speak in relation to Hastings and perhaps Blackpool. The woman behind the Friends of Hastings Pier, Jess Steele, who initiated the competition to which my company applied, having established the pier rebuilding programme, went on to form a company called Jericho Road. It has acquired a former news printing building right

in the centre of Hastings, which doubtless would have gone to a London developer to make fancy apartments. It has converted it into small local businesses: start-ups, workshops and so on.

That is doing quite well. It is progressing to a former, small coal-fired power station nearby in Ore, with a view to sustainably regenerating a considerable tract of land trapped within a valley and surrounded by housing.

That is one example. The other is Blackpool, where my company built what is dubbed locally the "Tower of Love". It is a multi-purpose building: a local restaurant, a tourist information office and a wedding facility, with a registrar's office and a very nice room looking at Blackpool tower. I like to think that the success of that project—it is constantly booked for weddings—has had a positive effect on society.

Baroness Valentine: I visit that place regularly—I work in Blackpool. Is there a planning reason why that is on its own on the other side of the tracks, because it seems such an obvious thing to celebrate the seaside?

Alex de Rijke: The master plan for the golden mile and its regeneration originally included many pavilions, of which this is the only one that was realised.

Baroness Valentine: Why were others not realised?

Alex de Rijke: It was finance, I believe.

The Chairman: Do you rely on capital from the local authority or central government?

Alex de Rijke: Blackpool Regeneration was our client.

Baroness Valentine: Is it right that a private sector developer would not have done it?

Alex de Rijke: Perhaps. I was not really party to how it was set up. We were simply employed.

Baroness Valentine: It looks to me as if it is making money now.

Alex de Rijke: Yes, and I am sure it could still happen. It does seem odd. Our building replaced a very worn-out public convenience. We simply supplanted it with a better facility, including toilets that the public could use. That was how we ended up on that site.

Q132 **Baroness Bakewell:** You have answered a lot of the points I was going to ask about, but I want you to enlarge on the relationship with Hastings pier. It won the Stirling Prize and looked wonderful. It looked pretty empty. It looked like a wonderful space that could offer to hold a Glastonbury or something. To what extent was your enterprise involved in how the pier would be used? Did you negotiate with potential users? Did you have ideas about what it would be for?

Alex de Rijke: We certainly contributed to imagining the events that could be staged there. We were not party to programming it once it was built. We had to prioritise the money available from the deck down, essentially; some £9 million of the £11.4 million was spent from the deck down. We had to make a very strong deck to support a great many different uses.

Baroness Bakewell: But you were not part of the subsequent history of it.

Alex de Rijke: No.

Baroness Bakewell: Do you regret that?

Alex de Rijke: Yes. I would have loved to be involved in the running of it. As a personal view, had the charity had a better database of connections and people to invite to stage events, only a few large music events a year might have made all the difference to its business plan and cash flow. It prioritised localism, which is admirable, but it was not complemented with larger cash-earning events.

Baroness Bakewell: An impresario with real flair might have made it work.

Alex de Rijke: Yes. Someone like Jools Holland might have made it the great music event it once was.

Baroness Bakewell: The destiny of piers is very wayward, but they often fail and fall into the hands of someone who says, "I can have a go at running it", and they do not. How can the future of Hastings, or any pier that falls on bad times, be shaped by the companies and people who purchase them for such a variety of reasons, a lot of it vanity?

Alex de Rijke: The tragedy of the Hastings story is that it was a publicly owned structure and space but, rather disappointingly, fell once again into private hands with a much narrower view on how to run it. The secret would be to allow the community to become better organised and versed in business. Not many businesses are massively profitable after one year. I thought it was harsh of the administrator to relieve them of certain responsibilities.

Baroness Bakewell: If the Heritage Lottery Fund is putting money into an enterprise such as that, why can it not make it conditional on a decent business plan?

Alex de Rijke: I believe that at the time it was. I was not party to the process. The whole sale of the pier was behind closed doors, so one is not aware of what the new criteria are compared with the former.

Lord Mawson: I visited Hastings a long time ago. I cannot remember how long ago it was, but I remember it as a very good experience. As a visitor, I felt that whoever was running it had a handle on the detail and had a feel for it. Therefore, at that time—whenever it was—it felt like a

very good thing and very different from any other pier I had been on.

Alex de Rijke: May I ask when that was?

Lord Mawson: I cannot remember. It was 10 years ago, or quite a long time ago. I remember the experience and remember it standing out—the feel, the detail and the design.

I spent a lot of my life working with architects on regeneration programmes. This sounds to me like a very familiar story. I have also danced a lot with the Heritage Lottery Fund and the details of these siloed organisations.

The Chairman: I am going to adjourn for the duration of the Division. We will return to the question of Hastings pier thereafter.

The Committee suspended for a Division in the House.

The Chairman: I am content to begin again, because I think Lord Mawson had made his point to our witnesses.

Lord Shutt of Greetland: On the issue of the Hastings pier, I have the old-fashioned accountancy view that there is a difference between capital and revenue. I wonder to what extent the charity perhaps was not sufficiently blessed by Heritage Lottery funding, or any other funding, and got into a problem right at the end with the capital. Was that an issue, or was it purely a matter of revenue?

Alex de Rijke: I believe it was the latter, although I was not party to the accounts. I understand it appointed a chair to run the pier charity as a wonderful public space with a revenue-generating programme attached to it. It seemed to me that rather quickly it was deemed to be failing. Piers have historically been private and have changed hands because people find it very difficult to make them profitable, but the Victorians who originally built them were very careful, as they were with their railways, to make sure that those managing them were incredibly responsible members of society. I think the Hastings pier charity, formerly White Rock Trust, with a wider concern for the locality, was a little naive, perhaps, in business and was not given the opportunity to do the very responsible work that it was doing. It could be reversed. The pier will definitely outlive the current owner.

Lord Lucas: It may end up gold.

Alex de Rijke: Of course. I knew that it would have to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. That is the story of every pier and it is strong enough to survive different chapters in its life.

A pier is a barometer of any town's economic position. It is very important that towns with piers are successful. The classic example is Brighton where you have one that has input and one that has declined and is continuing sad evidence of that.

The Chairman: I am not sure West Pier is a barometer of Brighton's economic regenerative success, although I suppose you could argue that it got the i360—an interesting way of trying to generate revenue to fund a capital project when the capital for the project has been underwritten by the local authority.

Lord Bishop of Lincoln: I find it shocking that £11.4 million of public money should be invested in a project and, as you hinted, passed on mysteriously to a private owner for a fairly modest amount. That is not an acceptable use of public money. Rather than dwelling too much on that, although it is a case study for this Committee, are there things that we can learn in general terms about the relationship between big grants from, for example, the lottery and sustainability? What lessons are to be learned strategically from this shocking case?

The Chairman: To add a supplementary to a supplementary, when the pier was being rebuilt why was not protection of the public interest incorporated into the agreement so that, even when it transferred into private hands, the purposes of the original White Rock Trust were written in for ever, as it were? Why did that not happen?

Alex de Rijke: That is a good question. I think it was simply never anticipated that the co-operative and community basis on which it was owned and run would so quickly devolve into administration and sale. It was probably an oversight, just as we seem to have a legal system that allows the assets of a charity to be acquired by a private individual at a knock-down rate.

Baroness Bakewell: Where were the Friends of the Pier in all this?

Andy Murdoch: The Friends of the Pier was a reaction to the imminent sale. I joined them in helping them to formulate an alternative business plan to that offered by the current owner. It was turned down by the administrator, despite the fact that more money was offered, it having been raised by crowdfunding.

That was a repeat of the process of topping up the original lottery grant to rebuild the pier. Those shareholders were asked again to invest in alternative business plan proposals. No one was paid to make those proposals, myself included. We simply made proposals for a different business model. It was a five-year plan with more buildings on the pier to extend the season, and these were not accepted by the administrator.

The Chairman: I am sure there are many more questions we might want to ask about this particular and sorry saga. I rather think we should be asking those of the local authority, administrator, the original charity and so on. Perhaps we as a Committee can write about that and pursue it.

Andrew, I am sorry we resumed when you were in the Division, but do you want to pick up your point quickly?

Lord Mawson: I go back to what the Bishop said earlier. I was thinking

that we might entitle our report “Old Piers Review”, “Elderly Piers Review”, or “Old Piers”, but this is not an old pier; it is a very good example of a new and modern pier.

This is not an uncommon tale for people such as me; we have seen this quite a lot of times. It might be quite interesting to dig into how the Heritage Lottery Fund works, the questions it asks, the age and experience of the people involved—they often do not have business skills—and the tick-box culture, because often it ends up putting well-meaning local people in exactly the situation you describe.

These are long-term pieces of work where a business person like you with business skills and others need to come to the project with the correct business skills to manage it so that these things do not happen, because none of the emphasis is on doing that. Then, lo and behold, you end up with this. A great example in the Church is the interfaith centre in Bradford post office, which in the millennium spent I do not know how many millions and within a very short period was in exactly the same position. I was in it a few weeks ago. It is a very nice building, but the business plan never worked.

I suspect that a lot of our seaside towns are littered with such behaviour. Boxes are ticked, the world moves on and no one learns from the experience. That is why I would encourage the Committee to get into this detail. It is awkward and difficult, but it is the detail that is wasting a great deal of money and putting people off who may never again get involved in their local towns because the experience has been so bad and difficult. What you notice, having been round these circles many times, is that the systems of the Civil Service and others never learn anything from the experience, and here we go again. There is the challenge.

The Chairman: I think it leads on rather neatly to your question, Michael.

Q133 **Lord Grade of Yarmouth:** To what extent do the big funders of these projects—the Heritage Lottery Fund or whatever—carry the responsibility for ensuring, as best they can, that, having put in the capital, the life of the project will be sustained on a business model that works? Are they capable of reading a business plan and looking at the people who are to run it? I declare a long-ago interest in running all the piers in Blackpool. As far as I can remember, they ate money.

The Chairman: But they are still standing, which is an achievement.

Lord Grade of Yarmouth: We did look after them.

Gary Young: I cannot say I know a lot about piers. Sir Terry Farrell designed a pier as a student project. There are a lot of piers around and they do not all attract huge visitor numbers, so the answer to your question is yes, of course. When we were involved in lottery projects before and after the millennium period there was scrutiny. For every project that got through, there were dozens that failed because they did

not meet the criteria, so of course there should be. That is when you are simply looking at capital from the lottery for a good cause.

The issue is complicated when you have Heritage Lottery funding and there is a heritage aspect: you have to retain the presence of important and historic icons and monuments. For every one of those that turned into a profitable concern there are others that did not. I worked on Tobacco Dock in Wapping. It is not on the seafront but it is right on the river. You can argue that the Thames is the sea. That is still not used properly, but a fortune was spent on restoring it to good condition, but not good use. Therefore, scrutiny is vital. That was not lottery money but private money, but scrutiny is vital. For every project that has succeeded there are dozens that have been discarded.

Piers are iconic; they are part of our culture. We tend to be drawn to iconic projects. The Deep, an aquarium, is an iconic project, and that succeeded, but quite often it is a mistake to look for iconic projects. You should start looking for smaller and broader-based investment in seaside towns, hence the reference to the Creative Foundation.

When I was in Liverpool I was asked to join a project called Hidden Liverpool, which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was to identify a dozen derelict buildings in Liverpool, ranging from buildings near the pier to a reservoir in Sefton, and ask school students to get inside them and find out what their ideas were. It was organised in 2013 by a group called Placed. This is part of the message that people start to understand their cultural environment and heritage better and learn about the business of restoration, so that for every one of those there is a business plan. Therefore, students are doing business plans. We do not do the plans; we design things for people, but students should be aware as they go through life that in developing culture there has to be the ability to find funding—crowdfunding or creative ways to bring funding from outside sources.

Andy Murdoch: Infrastructure related to coastal places has usually been designed for a different function from what it is being used for now. We have worked on a number of projects throughout the world, including in Detroit, a city that flourished. The infrastructure was on a certain scale, but industry in Detroit was scaled back and the communities needed to be consolidated. That oversized infrastructure makes the place dysfunctional, in a way.

We probably do not have that scale of problem in the UK, but we still have a number of small harbours that were used for fishing, passenger services or whatever, but that use has changed from an industrial function to more leisure-related activity. The infrastructure should be able to adapt quite readily at that scale to attract economic activity and bring communities together and so on.

Piers are an expensive form of infrastructure. I cannot say that I have personally ever quite understood the concept of a pier. I do not feel attracted to go out on a pier, unless there is something like The Deep at

the end of it. Maybe that is just a personal perspective. There is so much else that seaside towns have to offer that they can afford.

Lord Grade of Yarmouth: The problem is that I do not know of any economic model that will turn a pier into a profitable enterprise that will sustain the capital expenditure, the maintenance capex and so on needed to keep it going. However, if you let piers rot, it really says something terrible about the town.

Baroness Bakewell: You are right. I cited Southwold pier the other day. It is highly profitable. Young people have taken it on. They have made it into a middle-class outing. There is a very good restaurant; there are lots of interesting things to see; and it attracts a huge number of people from Suffolk's hinterland.

There are many successful piers. The ones in north Wales are very successful. It is the focal point for children, retired people and people with nothing to do; it is a very clear destination, so there is a whole range of models. Most of them fail, but they struggle on and somehow stubbornly refuse to die.

Lord Mawson: A lot are family businesses.

Baroness Bakewell: They have always begun as family businesses, but now they are frequently charities. Some are in the control of local government and some are private.

Andy Murdoch: The quality of public realm is really what makes a lot of places. Establishing and maintaining public realm is, in my view, a far more cost-effective use of funding than trying to maintain a costly pier. I am being slightly contentious.

The Chairman: I think you are inviting us to become excessively protective of our wonderful Victorian heritage.

I am going to move us on because I am conscious of the time. Jim has a question that takes us away from piers, which might not be a bad thing.

Baroness Whitaker: We are looking at this from only one point of view. There are not enough people with money to spend in Hastings. Southwold is a very affluent place. Do we not have to look at what allows people to earn enough money to spend at the pier?

The Chairman: That is a good and wider point.

Alex de Rijke: I am glad you said that because, if there is not a town square, the pier is the town square. It is also a kind of harbour; it is the only access to the sea other than down the beach. The problem with Hastings is access. Train fares are very high and the trains slow. When that changes it will have a different demographic profile and a different cohort of visitors.

The Chairman: If you took 30 minutes off the travel time it would

become a completely different Hastings, because I suspect it would make it a subset of Brighton.

Q134 **Lord Knight of Weymouth:** This question is for you, Andy. Are the coastal defence schemes that we fund delivering good value for money, and to what extent do they deliver wider economic benefits above the pure flood protection aim?

Andy Murdoch: The pure aim is absolutely important, but the way they are implemented needs to contribute to the wider economy. They should not be just a static form of defence. There are a number of projects where that model has been taken forward positively. I have mentioned Folkestone, but the work at Blackpool was conceptualised in the right way to protect communities, but using that coastal defence in a way that added to the public realm.

Lord Grade of Yarmouth: Rather than as a barrier. Is that what you are saying?

Andy Murdoch: Yes.

Lord Grade of Yarmouth: I am trying to understand it. Is there another aspect of sea defences that separates the shore from the people?

Andy Murdoch: That relationship in certain places is dealt with well; in other places, badly. An example of a lot of things that have gone wrong is Jaywick in Essex, which I visited about 15 years ago and which you may have visited recently. It is making bad press around the world. It made a number of classic mistakes. The one thing that struck me when I got there was that the sea defence wall cuts the community off from the sea rather than keeps the sea out. It could have been a lovely beach, if you could see it.

What we have tried to do at Folkestone is deal with things in such a way that you do not cut off the community from the sea. There are all kinds of ways one can do that, possibly through integrating level changes in the public realm.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: I have certainly seen that in West Bay near Bridport, Dorset. Regeneration there prior to the Broadchurch effect, which is now causing it to boom, was massively transformed by a DEFRA scheme, but I wonder whether, particularly for a department that is not awash with cash, the funding criteria allow for economic development or it is just good luck.

Andy Murdoch: There is a degree of good luck, but with all successful projects you have to engage the public and private sectors and the community. Folkestone has other benefits from being en route to somewhere rather than being at the end of the line.

Gary Young: Folkestone launched itself with single regeneration budget money, which the council decided to use to create land assembly. It is a

partnership. It brought in a major wealthy landowner and now it is beginning to see some of the benefits.

Andy Murdoch: That project is being managed privately, but public sector funding has formed part of it. It is carefully managed. There is an entrepreneurial interest in making a success of it rather than just providing the static defence.

Q135 **Baroness Wyld:** Mr Murdoch, you have pre-empted my question, which is about partnerships between the public and private sectors. We have touched on some things that have gone well among all the problems we have talked about. Some of the examples we have seen arise, unsurprisingly, when there are no silos and people are, from my perspective, often going beyond their day job and not thinking ideologically but working as a team. First and foremost, would you agree with that? Where do you think the balance should lie between the role of, say, the local authority and local entrepreneurs?

Andy Murdoch: If something is driven commercially but has enough counterbalance to do the right thing long term, that is when one has to strike a balance. Having an entrepreneurial developer or individual go for something that may have some degree of ideological background, but is actually a development aimed at delivering a return and being sustainable economically as well as environmentally, means having the right drive and impetus to make things happen and to manage maintenance and the business case. Having the public sector or community own that business case is difficult. I think it does need to be driven largely commercially, but with the right checks and balances.

The Chairman: It is about getting the balance of public and private right.

Baroness Wyld: Off the top of your head, are there any people who spring to mind as inspirational leaders who have been able to make the case to communities and take people with them on the journey?

Andy Murdoch: Roger De Haan has driven the Folkestone project, and I think he built the confidence to get funding for the sea defences.

Gary Young: I spoke to the project manager during that period and he said that the key was leveraging other land. A series of amusement arcades—typically in a seaside town—needed to be brought in. The owners of the arcades were persuaded to sell to De Haan to enable him to do the work. He then went on successfully to do Dreamland Margate, so it was a win-win. He owns two bunches of amusement arcades and they persuaded him to concentrate on one.

The Chairman: I think we picked that up in an earlier session.

Alex de Rijke: Roger De Haan is an excellent example of philanthropy top-down, if you like, but bottom-up would be Jess Steele.

Lord Mawson: We visited Jaywick. It is interesting to hear you say that

there is another engineering solution and that the one chosen is not the greatest, which I suspect is true. If you look at the experience in Skegness and the part managed by the local authority, you would never want to go. If you compared Cannes with Skegness and the seafront managed by the local authority, my children would not want to go.

It is really a question of leadership. I have colleagues who live in Jaywick. They own three houses in Jaywick, so I am very interested to hear their inside view of what is really going on. There is a lot of entrepreneurial behaviour in Jaywick. Do you wonder sometimes whether there are the right kinds of relationships, not just between the public and private sectors but key people in those communities? If you can get that right, take the long view, get into the detail of the difficulty with these broken systems and it persists long enough and survives, some very interesting things go on.

Is the leadership really there? The Victorians put Morecambe station right on the seafront, where you have fantastic views. Then you look at the shocking stuff they built. It really is mediocre. None of it seems to hang together. Fortunately, Urban Splash has redone the hotel on the front. It looks really good, but it was derelict for many years. Is the public sector really capable of doing this stuff?

Andy Murdoch: The simple answer is: not in isolation. It can provide the catalyst and framework for success.

Lord Mawson: Is it capable of leading it?

Andy Murdoch: Not consistently. I think it is patchy.

Lord Lucas: Is there anything coming up in the technology of sea defences that we should be aware of? We just think of them as a wall, but is our understanding of modelling seaside processes getting good enough that we can think of other concepts of sea defence?

Andy Murdoch: The science is there to create some parameters to work with on climate change, sea level rise and so on. It is probably easier to think of it in level terms, but there are ways one can look at the way mudflats are handled and the different ways of dealing with it offshore. I do not believe we are quite there to handle things like sea level rise directly other than by dealing with it by levels or the way one profiles the shoreline, beaches and so on. Lots of things can be done by being more creative in removing the pure infrastructure impact and severance that sea defences cause for communities by trying to keep the sea out.

The Chairman: I think we need to look at that point.

Alex de Rijke: I am from a Dutch engineering background. I would say that the difference between the UK approach and the Dutch approach is that in the UK one defends with barriers and the like. It is a windy island, so there is a lot to defend. In Holland, on the other hand, the presence of water and knowledge that it will always win makes people work with it rather than against it. Rather than try to stop the place flooding, you

work with it to generate energy, for example, and perhaps return certain areas to ecologically sustainable wetlands.

Blackpool is a good example. We mentioned the defence work there. That is not a wall; the coastal defence is steps to the beach. It is beautifully done. It is important to invite very good engineers, architects and landscape designers to create a coastal defence system that is more than simply defence.

The Chairman: We picked up that point.

Lord Shutt of Greetland: I have one question arising from what I have heard today. Gary Young mentioned this, but others did not demur. He said, "We just design things. We are like barristers picking up a brief". Do you not think you have some responsibility to prod and poke and say, "Are you sure you are on the right wicket?"

Gary Young: Of course. I was alluding to the fact that understanding the economy of the work should be embedded in people from a young age. Of course, we understand as much as we possibly can; the final auditor is someone who has access to information that we do not necessarily have, but it is a question of understanding instinctively which projects will have life and succeed.

I go back to Hull and the example of the aquarium. That project has been tried dozens of times across the country, and in London and elsewhere it has succeeded. That was probably a unique set of circumstances. I was pointing out the fact that you cannot necessarily from our point of view manufacture those perfect environments. You can understand it when you see it; you can understand how important it is, and obviously the longevity of a project, having seen some that have not had longevity, is vital.

Q136 **Baroness Whitaker:** There are national policy challenges that could hinder projects unduly—for instance, plonking down infrastructure rather than place-making, or top-down master plans as opposed to public engagement. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Andy Murdoch: It is really important to do the right thing rather than just work the design well.

Baroness Whitaker: But "the right thing" is a vague term.

Andy Murdoch: Place-making is about working out what is right for the place, and sea defences are one element of that.

Baroness Whitaker: Are you saying that national policy could hinder that?

Andy Murdoch: Perhaps national policy is too boxed at the moment. There is not an integrated policy, as far as I can work it out, that brings all the economic and regeneration aspects together with sea defences. Sea defences are driven by the Environment Agency.

Baroness Whitaker: You are saying they do not take into account place-making.

Andy Murdoch: Yes.

Gary Young: I think that for place-making national policy has to encourage creativity, because that is one of the driving forces behind people's pride in the place where they live. It can be done in a very small way incrementally. Too often it is just seen as a big hit.

The Chairman: We should invest more in imagination.

Alex de Rijke: Yes, and creativity should be holistic, not simply project-focused. For example, in Hastings there is a very nice new gallery called the Jerwood Gallery. It has been placed among the already successful fishing huts.

Baroness Whitaker: They hate it.

Alex de Rijke: Not only does it take up space; it creates an overly focused small area, whereas right at the other end of the promenade—the unvisited end—is St Leonards. The pier is exactly between the two. Had there been three things to visit, it would have encouraged a great deal of footfall along the harbour.

Baroness Whitaker: Jerwood is not exactly national policy, is it? It is an entirely private sector, charitable thing—there is no public funding.

Alex de Rijke: Yes.

The Chairman: It almost goes to Andrew's point about the impact of different styles of leadership and the interplay between private and public sector leadership.

Baroness Whitaker: Even more than that, it goes to the idea of making a good place.

Lord Mawson: I used to think that Hull was a very depressing place when I lived in Bradford, but some really interesting things are going on in Hull. I was at the lagoons project last week. Some of the things that have gone on in Hull are stimulating an entrepreneurial culture, with very good local people starting to become very aspiring about their place. The challenge to the Government and all of us is: are we going to get behind these people? For me, the signs in Hull are very encouraging.

Alex de Rijke: I would say the same for Hastings, despite the story of the pier. For example, right next to it is a wonderful underground skate park that has been converted from a former swimming pool. There are many projects.

Gary Young: Read "Impact 18", the research project on Liverpool. It is really worth reading.

The Chairman: I am going to close it there. We have run massively over

time. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon. It has been very interesting indeed.