

## **SEASIDE TOWNS ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (STEP)**

The STEP is a national investment agency for British Seaside Towns, dedicated to unleashing their potential and changing perceptions about the opportunity that they provide for both investors and consumers.

The STEP will be:

1. A VEHICLE FOR INVESTMENT that can collaboratively attract and create direct and indirect investment opportunities from both public and private sources
2. A SKILLS and knowledge house that shares knowledge and ideas and can source and deploy high-impact teams to tackle specific seaside issues
3. A VOICE for Seaside Towns, to influence the powerful; the politicians, the investors and the consumers / visitors

### **What a successful outcome will look like**

The STEP will gather together, inspire, inform and represent seaside towns that want to use their unique assets to make a step-change in their local economies; towns that are proud of being by the sea, and want to stimulate development that embraces the sea, not turns its back on it. The partnership is led by a wide variety of seaside business interests and independently facilitated. The STEP will seek to raise investment finance to be matched locally and used to develop seaside assets and enterprise that directly create jobs, training, business opportunities and local engagement; to contract with Government as the voice and delivery partner for seaside economic development; and to establish itself as an independent, resilient organisation, owned and led by its members through a rolling programme of purchasing, restoring and selling on seaside assets and developing innovative products, services and IPR that generate their own income.

**Driven by a passion for the seaside and an interest in return on investment, a STEP will enable seaside towns to take control of their own destiny. Polycentric, with very strong local ownership and leadership together with true collaboration between private and social enterprise and public sector, seaside towns can share resources, act entrepreneurially and create a prospectus to attract investment and become once more an international envy and inspiration.**

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## **CONTEXT OF THE STEP**

### **The challenge**

Both Labour and Conservative parties published Seaside Strategies before the election, recognising perhaps that seaside towns have far more in common with each other than with their closest inland cities or rural villages. Over the past five years seaside towns have begun to collaborate, through the LGA's Coastal Interest Group, BURA's Seaside Network, the Coastal Communities Alliance and, more recently, Seaside and Coastal Space.

Economically, seaside towns suffer from 180 degree catchments, relatively poor transport links, the seasonality of employment and business activity, and decades of underinvestment. Yet they also boast some of the best

quality environments in the country. However, too much seaside policy has been top-down and inland-out. High level strategies have stereotyped the seaside and responded generically. With low wages and poor transport, peripheral towns find it hard to attract the most dynamic movers and shakers – that's why we need to share nationally, to build a crack team with the expertise, funding and passion for the seaside.

### **How it is tackled**

Seaside towns can work together to shape their economic destiny. Their unique spread around the country means that collaboration to raise the profile of the British seaside as a whole makes more sense than internal competition, as is inevitable between rival towns or cities in geographical clumps. Drawing on the heritage of the Cinque Ports or the Hanseatic League, we can shape the future collaboratively, not only through a joint voice and sharing best practice, but through *doing business in league*. And there is a new generation of business owners, from pioneering hoteliers investing not just in their own buildings but in nearby shops and facilities, to budding entrepreneurs who want to bring their children up by the sea.