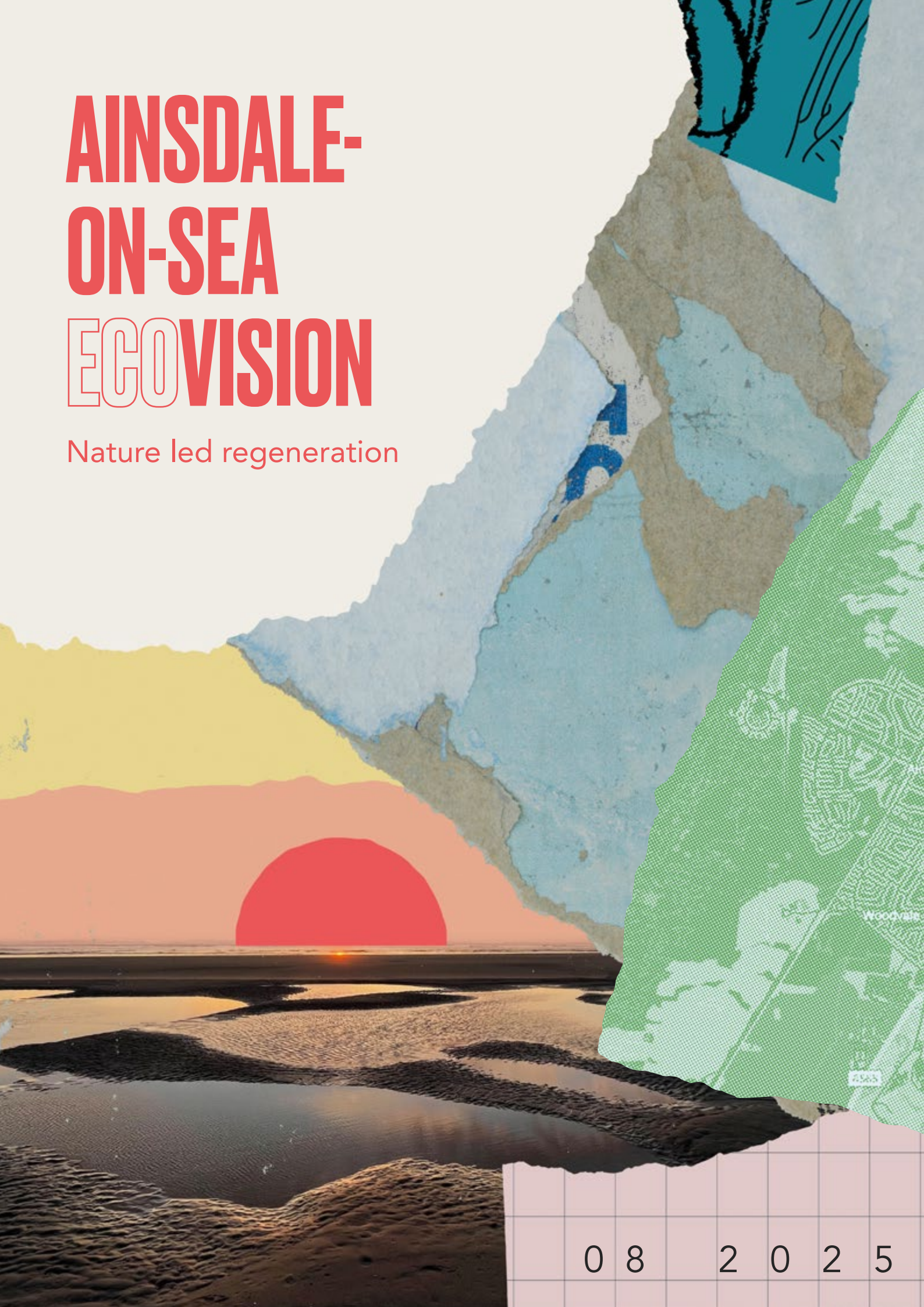


AINSDALE- ON-SEA ECOVISION

Nature led regeneration



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01 INTRODUCTION

Ainsdale-on-Sea is one of Sefton's primary Coastal Gateways along with Crosby, Formby and Southport. The Coastal Gateway contains a number of assets controlled by Sefton Council in need of investment and regeneration. Under a co-ordinated strategy these assets could better contribute to the functioning of the area, and its sustainability as a gateway to beach activities and extreme kite sports as well as a valued amenity for residents of Ainsdale.

The future development of these assets needs to take account the environmental sensitivity of the locality and the national and international importance of the natural environment.

The Coastal Gateway also includes the site of the former Pontins holiday park, which closed in January 2024 and forms an essential part of the context and a unique opportunity for the future of the Coastal Gateway and the wider visitor economy of Sefton.

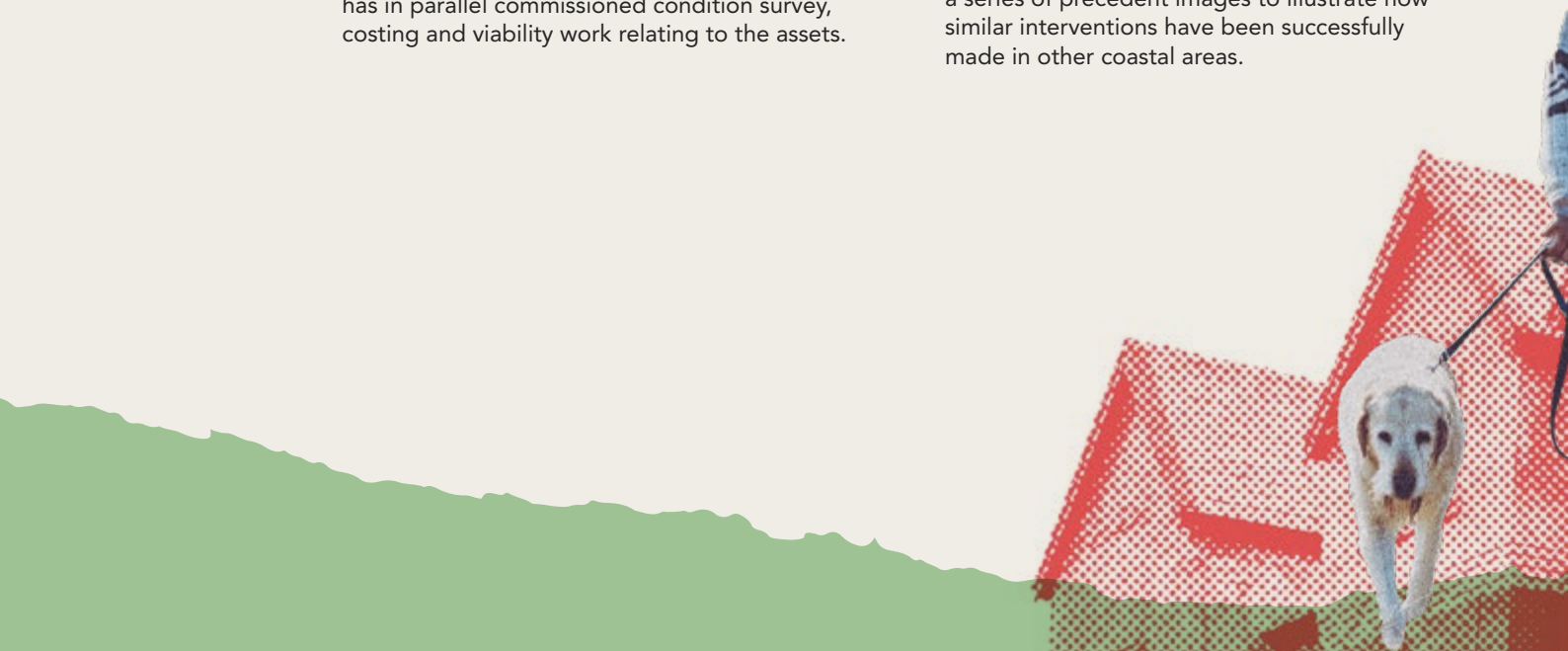
This document has been commissioned by Sefton Council. It is intended to provide a vision for how its' assets could be utilised to support the regeneration of the Coastal Gateway and to provide a high quality and sustainable environment for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The document does not constitute a planning document and should not be interpreted as such.

This document does not contain costing, viability or detailed feasibility appraisal for any of the suggested interventions. It should be noted that as this document has been prepared, the Council has in parallel commissioned condition survey, costing and viability work relating to the assets.

This document is structured as follows:

- Section 2: The Sands of Time – the story of Ainsdale-on-Sea's origins and growth
- Section 3: Ainsdale-on-Sea today –a look at how the Coastal Gateway functions today and opportunities for improvement
- Section 4: EcoVision: nature led regeneration setting out the rationale for creating a vision, why it is distinctive and authentic, how it will help to deliver against a number of thematic considerations including sustainability, climate change, nature preservation and recovery, sustainable tourism, health and wellbeing, learning and accessibility.
- Section 5: Spatial Framework – setting out how assets in the Coastal Gateway may evolve and be invested in to deliver the vision. This section provides a description of how the Coastal Gateway might evolve with artist's impressions included to illustrate the vision.
- Section 6: Precedents – this section contains a series of precedent images to illustrate how similar interventions have been successfully made in other coastal areas.









UNDERSTANDING THE SEFTON COAST...

Natural Heritage

The Sefton Coast is home to extremely rare, protected and threatened species including the Natterjack Toad, Sand Lizard, Northern Dune Tiger Beetle, Red Squirrel, Dune Helleborine and Petalwort. Over 1,200 species of wild flowers can be found here, including 11 species of orchid. It is one of the most botanically important areas in the country. The coastline as part of the East Atlantic Flyway is vital to tens of thousands of migrating birds and wintering species including Pink Footed Geese, and thousands of other wildfowl and waders.

Landscapes

A mosaic of habitats in over 20 miles of sandy shoreline topped and tailed by the Ribble and Mersey and bisected by the Alt estuary. The shoreline is backed by the most extensive dune system in England (this habitat is rarer than rain forest) and introduced pine belt and globally rare dune heath.

Archaeology and history

Prehistoric footprints trapped in the silt from Formby to Ainsdale, occasionally exposed after periods of hard weather, a petrified forest dating back as long as 10,000 years at Hightown Rich Local Viking heritage, World War Two heritage and the remains of the "Lost Resort" at Ravenmeols in Formby, and the site of the world's first Lifeboat Station.

Maritime history

The rich maritime history of Liverpool Bay is reflected in numerous shipwrecks along the coast including the 19th century cotton trader the Star of Hope at Ainsdale.

[Summarised from Sefton Coast Plan Visioning Position Statement 2021]

02 THE SANDS OF TIME

It is important to understand Ainsdale-on-Sea's history – the ambitions that led to its formation in to a place and the implications for the vision. In this section the historical development of Ainsdale on Sea is considered based on archival research, historic records and photographs. This covers the period from the Victorians through to the present day.



Inland origins of Ainsdale...

The settlement of Ainsdale was, by the mid 19th century, a largely residential village located inland and away from the coastal sand dunes. The residents of Ainsdale were principally engaged in agriculture, including, notably, the systematic farming of rabbits on the sandy warrens to the west of the village. The 1841 census records a total of 176 residents in 30 houses, no less than 22 of which were farmhouses.

The extent and character of the village does not appear to have been immediately influenced by the opening of the Liverpool, Crosby and Southport Railway ('LCSR') in 1848, despite Ainsdale gaining one of half a dozen original stations. The route of the railway and the scarcity of built form to the west of it is reflected in the 1848 OS map.



Extract from OS County Series Map of Lancashire, 1848

Extracts from the OS County Series Map of Lancashire, 1893



The potential for residential or leisure development on the land to the west of the LCSR line was first explored by Thomas Weld-Blundell, who, when negotiating the conditions for releasing land for the Southport and Cheshire Lines Extension Railway ('SCLER'), insisted on the inclusion of an option of having a station built at Ainsdale-on-Sea. The SCLER line opened in 1884, three years before Thomas Weld-Blundell's death, and is shown to have cut directly through the sand dunes on the 1893 OS map (Figure 1.10). The Cheshire Lines Cottages were built in c. 1880 in advance of the construction of the SCLER line as accommodation for railway workers.

A Victorian Vision for Ainsdale-on-Sea

Thomas Weld-Blundell's estate was inherited by his son, Charles, in 1887. Charles Weld-Blundell's vision for Ainsdale-on-Sea was ambitious and involved the creation of a tree-lined boulevard from Ainsdale station to the shore (later Shore Road), a six-mile long promenade connecting Birkdale and Freshfield with Ainsdale at its centre and a pier extending out into the sea. An artist's impression of the scheme dated c. 1900 shows architecturally grand houses and reflects Weld-Blundell's intention to target the wealthy middle classes. The early progress of the scheme was slow, however, and only a small number of villas were built on the newly formed Shore Road 1900.





In an attempt to give impetus to the scheme, Weld-Blundell invoked the option to have a station built on the SCLER line. The station, originally called 'Seaside', opened in 1901 and included a long platform, a signal cabin, level crossing, waiting rooms and ticket office. By 1902, Shore Road had been extended almost to Seaside Station, although there remained large gaps between the houses. To further encourage development, Weld-Blundell built a new hotel, known as 'Lakeside', alongside Seaside Station.



F. G. Fraser's Scheme for Ainsdale-on-Sea, c. 1908

● Development on the Promenade

The 1908 OS map also reflects the construction of the first (and only) houses on the Promenade. The slow progress of the scheme led Weld-Blundell to commission a revised and more modest development plan). This plan showed a reduced seafront with no pier and housing of a more restrained architectural style. This coincided with a deliberate move 'down market' and a tactical shift in focus away from the isolated coastal area to the land surrounding the popular LCSR electrified commuter line.



Artist's Impression of Ainsdale-on-Sea, c. 1900

Ainsdale Parish Council starts to shape the place

From around 1910, the newly formed Ainsdale Parish Council too became interested in the potential of Ainsdale-on-Sea as a leisure destination. Shortly after the Lakeside Hotel was built by Ward-Blundell, the Council commissioned the construction of a marine lake on the site of Bulrush Slack to accommodate pleasure boats. Preparations were also made to lay a bowling green and tennis courts and by the 1920s, Ainsdale-on-Sea had grown in popularity as a venue for day visitors. The majority of these visitors came from Liverpool, using the more frequent railway service provided on the electrified LCSR line. Others came by bicycle and, during summer weekends, the Lakeside Hotel's campsite around the lake would be covered by hundreds of small tents.

Photograph showing 'tents' by the lake. The SCLER line is to the left and in the background is the lake and Lakeside Hotel. Undated



The Seaside Garden Village

Plans were produced for a 'Seaside Garden Village', extending from the LCSR line to the shore, alongside an exhibition for small houses and bungalows. The garden village concept proved far more successful and the number of houses in Ainsdale-on-Sea grew significantly during the 1920s and 1930s, albeit in the area to the east of the SCLER line and not on the coast, as originally envisaged.



'Seaside Garden Village' Scheme, 1908

Construction of the Lido (Ainsdale Bathing Centre)

The extension of Southport County Borough to Birkdale and Ainsdale in 1912 meant the Corporation gained statutory powers to acquire the foreshore from the Ince-Blundell Estate. This did not happen until 1928, after several years of negotiations, when the Corporation purchased over 3,700 acres of foreshore and sand dunes in front of Ainsdale and Birkdale. In 1933, the Corporation funded the construction of a lido in front and to the south of the Promenade, known initially as the 'Ainsdale Bathing Centre'. The Ainsdale Bathing Centre included a café with an open-air terrace and a service providing take-away beach trays, dressing pavilions, showers, permanent bathing chalets, and bathing tents for hire. The formally arranged lido can be clearly seen in a 1938 aerial photograph of Ainsdale-on-Sea, which also shows the many lakeside campers and cars parked on the sandy beach.



Aerial photograph of Ainsdale-on-Sea, 1938. The Ainsdale Bathing Centre, built just five years earlier, is visible in the foreground

World War II and Ainsdale's 1950s Revival

During the Second World War, much of the seafront area, including the buildings on the Promenade and the lido were requisitioned for use as a naval base, known as H.M.S. Queen Charlotte. The lido was converted for use as a gunnery school in 1941 and many gunners who served in armed merchant ships on Atlantic convoys trained at Ainsdale. Women serving in the Women's Royal Naval Service on the base were stationed at the Lakeside Hotel. The base was closed in 1946.

The popularity of Ainsdale-on-Sea as a daytime seaside resort recovered in the 1950s, with many visitors using either the bus or the electrified LCSR line. The SCLER line proved less popular and was closed in 1952. Further buildings were added to both sides of the Promenade in the late 1940s and early 1950s, including a wooden lookout tower for use by lifeguards.

In 1952, the number of vehicles parking on Ainsdale beach reached 12,500 and visitors are recorded to have hired 17,800 deckchairs.

Despite efforts to revive the lido, changing social practices led to its decline in popularity as visitors to the beach often brought all of the required facilities and equipment in the boots of their cars. For the same reason, the popularity of the beach did not support the overnight tourism industry and the limited number of local private hotels were converted into public houses with rented accommodation or, in the case of Toad Hall, a night club venue. From 1966, the abandoned SCLER track bed was repurposed as a coastal road linking Ainsdale-on-Sea more directly to the A565 at Woodvale, as well as Birkdale to the north.

Development in the 1960s

The next major change with the construction of Ponton's Holiday Village, which opened in 1969, occupying a large area to the east of the Promenade and as far as Coastal Road. The holiday camp, when originally built, comprised blocks of brick chalets, a swimming pool, leisure facilities, ballroom, bars and dining accommodation. In 1973, Pontin's submitted plans to absorb the site of the Lakeside Hotel and construct a large hotel and chalets in a landscaped park. It is understood that there was local opposition to the proposals and the planning application was withdrawn.

Recognition of Nature's Significance

Ainsdale Beach was designated as part of the 'Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills Nature Reserve' in 1980. The main range of the former lido was, for a time, utilised by the Nature Reserve as a visitors' centre until its demolition in 2007. The visitors' centre, known as the 'Ainsdale Discovery Centre', is now housed in a small cabin built on the former site of the lido and in the last remaining (southern) range.

The Edwardian apartments and boarding houses on the east side of the Promenade came to be known collectively as Toad Hall from the 1960s, after they were converted for use as a night club venue. The venue closed in c. 1990 and was subsequently used as offices until at least 2009, before becoming vacant and suffering a fire in 2014. The building has since remained vacant and was used as the canvas for a large mural depicting two Sand Lizards in 2021. The mural, painted by Paul Curtis, is reportedly the largest painting created by a single artist in the UK.

During the second half of the 20th century, the Lakeside Hotel was renamed the 'Sands'. The building was also extended first to the rear (north) and then to the side (west) and a surface car park was laid out on the adjacent land. The rear extension had been demolished by 2000, though remains of the extension survive in the form of foundations to the north of the main building. The Sands Public House was closed in 2017 and has been vacant since.

03 AINSDALE-ON-SEA TODAY

In this section the strategic context is first considered, with reference to key Council strategies, plans and policies. Then, consideration is given to the most recent visitor survey work undertaken by the Council and what this reveals about how visitors rate the current amenities and would like to see the Coastal Gateway regenerated in the future. The section concludes with an analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis).

Strategic Context

In 2021 Sefton Council published its' "Sefton Coast Plan: Visioning Position Statement". The following is extracted from that document and provides essential context:

"Ainsdale-on-Sea lies within a rural part of the Sefton Coast, at the southern edge of Southport. Ainsdale-on-Sea includes expansive areas of beach, sand dunes, dune slacks and a richness of special and rare flowers and grasses as well as the Natterjack toads and sand lizards for which this part of the Sefton Coast is noted.

It also includes the lake adjacent to the former 'Sands' pub which has paths and boardwalks all round it and a range of other special natural features. As well as The Sands, other buildings, such as Toad Hall, reflect past Victorian / Edwardian aspirations for the proposed resort of Ainsdale-on Sea. There are more modern buildings such as Ainsdale Discovery Centre, the small toilet block next to the main beach entrance and the Pontins holiday park.

There is a small car park off Shore Road and for many years the beach has been used for car parking (for up to 2,500 or so cars). The Trans Pennine Trail cycling and walking route (linking to central Southport, south Sefton, Liverpool and beyond) and the Sefton Coast Path run through Ainsdale-on-Sea and there are road and path links to Ainsdale Village centre, station and bus routes.

As well as being the main beach in Sefton for 'bucket and spade' and traditional family beach activities, Ainsdale is also recognised as one of the main beaches in the UK for extreme kite activities, with zones set aside for kite buggy, landboard use and kitesurfing.

As this is also a sensitive location and natural environment there is potential for enhanced car park management, enhanced visitor facilities, new and improved paths and other 'movement networks' and enhanced zoning and management of natural areas (which may vary over time). Links with Ainsdale Village and cycle and path routes can be encouraged. This has the potential to benefit both visitors and the natural environment."

The Sefton Coast Plan: Visioning Position Statement also recognises the sensitivity of the natural environment and highlights that a balanced approach to development is required. Getting this balance right the Statement concludes that the Coast can become the Borough's greatest asset:

"...creating jobs and economy, a lovely place to visit and live, as well as contributing positively to the climate change agenda and the international biodiversity crisis."

The area is formally protected as internationally important dune habitat, supporting many rare and important species of flora and fauna, as well as providing a natural sea defence. The intertidal areas support internationally important populations of overwintering birds, and the coast is important for passage migrant birds, for breeding populations of European Protected Species such as Natterjack Toad and Sand Lizard, for locally rare insects and other invertebrates and is a hotspot for biodiversity. The Coast is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site and Local Nature Reserve.

PLANNING POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Sefton Local Plan, adopted in 2017, sets the framework for assessing planning applications for development proposals on the Coast.

The Local Plan sees the Coast as Sefton's key natural asset, and part of its strategic green infrastructure network. Nature policies and objectives prioritise the conservation, management and enhancement of Coastal landscapes, habitats and species.

The Sefton Coast is also one of the Liverpool City Region's Nature Improvement Area Focus Areas. As part of this, it is really important that visitor numbers and overall people pressure are managed - to direct people away from the most sensitive and vulnerable parts of the Coast, towards less sensitive and vulnerable areas and any attractions and facilities sited in these locations, or further afield. The most sensitive and vulnerable areas vary over time, seasonally and even daily if they are affected by the tide.

Relevant Planning Policies from Sefton Local Plan (adopted 2017)

Policy MN7 – Green Belt: This policy relates to development in the Green Belt and the extension or replacement of existing buildings. The Ainsdale-on-Sea Coastal Gateway is located within the Green Belt

Policy ED5 – Tourism: This policy covers Strategic Tourism Locations and Other Tourism Development. Ainsdale-on-Sea Coastal Gateway is not a Strategic Tourism Location and so any proposed development falls under part 2 of the policy which states that "sustainable tourism development will be supported in principle where it relates to location-specific tourism assets and is consistent with other Local Plan policies".

Policy EQ9 – Strategic Paths

Policy NH1 – Natural Assets: This policy covers the protection and enhancement of Sefton's natural assets and landscapes.

Policy NH2 – Nature: This policy covers matters in relation to the conservation and enhancement of nature

Policy NH4 – The Sefton Coast: This policy covers matters relating to development and the Sefton Coast, including flooding, coastal erosion, sea defence, water quality, and nature conservation. Part of Ainsdale-on-Sea Coastal Gateway is in Policy NH4's Coastal Change Management Area where development must take into account the risk of coastal change and the vulnerability of the development.

Policy NH15 – Heritage Assets: This policy covers matters relating to heritage assets and built heritage.



Consultation to Date

Consultation on the future development of Ainsdale-on-Sea Coastal Gateway was first proposed in Winter 2019 and was due to take place during the Summer season of 2020. Due to Covid this consultation did not take place. Subsequently, consultation took place as part of the Southport Town Deal bid (Summer 2020). As a response to theme three of that consultation: Stronger Economy, the investment in Ainsdale-on-Sea Visitor Hub featured as the third most popular option.

A further, more detailed, consultation was then completed by Sefton Council in the summer of 2021, building on the comments received from the Town Deal consultation, the operational changes that had taken place over the previous 2 years, and the developments planned for the area. The aim of the consultation was to ask people about their views on Ainsdale-on-Sea, what works well, what could be improved, what they think the area should be in the future and to inform people about the changes being delivered in the area in 2021/ 2022.

Summary of Responses

There were 781 responses to the consultation. The majority of respondents were Sefton residents from the local area, rather than visitors.

Getting to the coast

Most people (44%) stated that they walk to the Coastal Gateway with a similar percentage (38%) arriving by car. Most of these were Sefton residents but 35 respondents arrived in motorhomes (visitors to the area) and one by mobility scooter. Cycling and use of the train were cited by 5% of respondents.

Views on amenities

In terms of view on amenities within the Coastal Gateway, 'Toilet Facilities' were rated as poor or very poor by 85% of respondents. At the time of the survey there were only portaloos on site with no running water due to covid restrictions, which may explain the strength of views expressed.

Only 8% of respondents rated the 'Availability of Refreshments' as good or excellent with the majority rating the offering as poor. 'Visitor Information', 'Parking' and 'Picnic Areas' were rated similarly by respondents to the survey.

The overall conclusion is that the facilities and services currently provided for visitors are considered poor, with the exception of 'Nature Trails', which are rated good through to excellent.

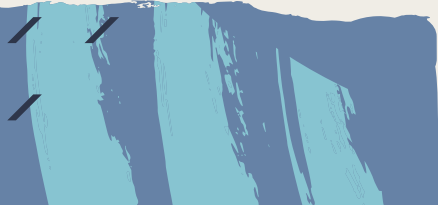
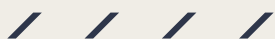
How people would like facilities to be improved

Looking to the future, the survey also included questions about potential future facilities and what would be favoured by respondents. 'Café uses and 'improved parking' facilities were picked by over half of respondents, with a 'visitor centre', and 'improvements to Habitat Management' and 'Nature Trails' also scoring highly.

Views on the re-use of buildings

The majority of respondents (more than two thirds) wanted to see Toad Hall, the Sands, the Ainsdale Discovery Centre and the other buildings identified remain and be repurposed. Less than 10% wanted them demolished, and not replaced, with around a quarter wanting them to be replaced by new building(s). Suggestions varied from retail / food and drink to sports/spa to watersports centre to residential use and beach huts.

The boardwalk (Sands Lake Nature Trail) was reported by respondents to be well used but considered to be in poor condition and not fit for purpose. Most comments received from respondents were concerned with restoring and maintaining it, suggesting it is a popular facility.



SWOT ANALYSIS

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with Ainsdale-on-Sea following site visits and research along with consideration of views expressed during the previous public consultations. These have been assessed by the following themes: Access; Movement; Facilities; Landscape and Landmarks.

THEME: ACCESSIBILITY

Proximity to the train station

Strengths:

- Frequent train services from Liverpool and Southport to Ainsdale Village (15 minute frequency in peak)
- Modern station facilities

Weaknesses:

- Relatively long walk from station to Coastal Gateway (1.5km / 20 minutes)
- Lack of interconnecting bus services

Opportunities:

- Improved signage to beach, bike hire, trolley hire to assist with luggage



Proximity to Ainsdale Village

Strengths:

- Vibrant and thriving village centre
- Large resident population for whom the Coastal Gateway is a key recreation space
- Recent improvements to cycling / walking route along Shore Road to junction with roundabout

Weaknesses:

- No visual connection between village centre and Coastal Gateway
- Pedestrian access impeded by busy Shore Road roundabout

Opportunities:

- Improved signage for visitors and wayfinding to the Coastal Gateway
- Information about amenities on offer in village centre within Coastal Gateway
- Opportunity to improve pedestrian connections across Shore Road roundabout

Threats

- Managing visitor parking in peak times when demand exceeds supply of car parking spaces

Access from Coastal Road

Strengths:

- Direct access from the Coastal Road for vehicles
- Dedicated cycle lane / pedestrian footpath along Coastal Road

Weaknesses:

- Lack of signalized pedestrian and cycle crossing points across Shore Road Roundabout
- Speed limit of 50mph on Coastal Road can make crossing difficult as a pedestrian
- Extensive "land take" of roundabout creates a vehicle dominated gateway
- Queuing traffic on peak days can back up on Coastal Road

Opportunities:

- Review / redesign roundabout to better manage conflicts with different modes of travel
- Create a signalized pedestrian crossing point
- "Reclaim" inefficient use of land from roundabout
- Create new public art with a coastal theme giving the Coastal Gateway a distinct visual identity
- Installation of "smart signage" to direct visitors to available car parking spaces and better manage peak day demand from visitors



THEME: MOVEMENT

Direct Access to the Beach

Strengths:

- All day and season ticket parking options popular with visitors

Weaknesses:

- Beach parking highly dependent on weather conditions and safety considerations
- Costs associated with recovery of vehicles from beach

Opportunities:

- Review options for extent of beach parking and opportunities to move this inland

Threats:

- Pollutants from car parking on beach and other impacts on landscape and ecology

Parking along the Promenade and Shore Road

Strengths:

- Proximity to the beach
- Free parking opportunities

Weaknesses:

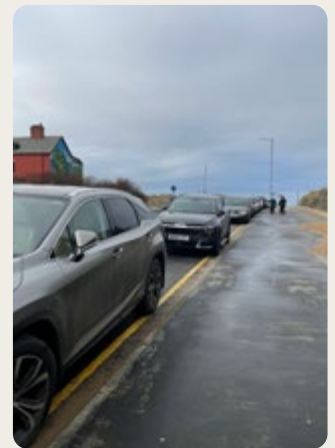
- Insufficient car parking capacity on-shore during peak days leading to congestion and queuing
- Arrangement of parking spaces does not maximise the capacity of the road space
- Parking at end of Promenade is secluded and has poor relationship with Pontins' site boundary
- Opportunities for anti-social behaviour as a result of lack of overlooking and activity
- Poor quality pedestrian environment along the Promenade encourages visitors to "shortcut" across the sensitive dunescape

Opportunities:

- Potential to redesign road space along Promenade to incorporate more parking and to examine re-use of previously developed land and buildings
- Potential to close off the Promenade to vehicular traffic at night, limiting opportunities for anti-social behaviour

Threats:

- Continued use of the area for anti-social behavior / reputational damage



National Cycle Network route 62

Strengths:

- Segregated route alongside Coastal Road providing safe and easy access to Southport (to the North)
- Well used

Weaknesses:

- Lack of cycle parking / storage facilities within Coastal Gateway
- Lack of signaled crossing for cycles at Shore Road roundabout makes crossing difficult

Opportunities:

- Provide "cycle hub" facilities within the Coastal Gateway to provide secure parking and storage
- Opportunity to establish the Coastal Gateway as a destination / stop off point on the National Cycle Network

Threats:

- Maintenance of existing route and wooden barriers / posts along Coastal Road

THEME: LANDSCAPE

The Sand Dunes and Beach

Strengths:

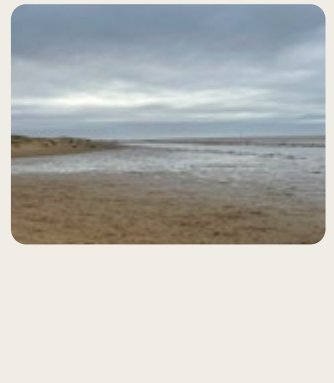
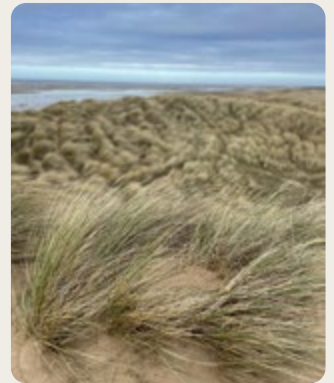
- Ecologically significant – internationally, nationally and locally
- Physical and mental wellbeing benefits to residents and visitors of spending time in nature
- Opportunities for active lifestyles and sports on the beach (e.g. walking, cycling, kite surfing)

Opportunities:

- Protect and enhance landscape
- Provide more opportunities for understanding and interpreting this valuable landscape and the ecology it supports

Threats:

- Need to mitigate against visitor impacts on the landscape
- Lack of on land car park options and parking pressures on peak days
- On beach car parking and potential for pollution from vehicles



The Sands Lake

Strengths:

- High ecological value
- Opportunities for shorter circular walks and associated health and wellbeing benefits
- Historic investment in boardwalk and signage / interpretation

Weaknesses:

- Entrance to lake lacks prominence and visibility from Shore Road
- Poor condition of adjacent public car park and vacant Sands public house detracts from lake's setting
- Deterioration of lakeside boardwalk and furniture

Opportunities:

- Refurbishment of boardwalk
- Updated signage as part of integrated way finding for the Coastal Gateway
- New information boards to help visitors understand the history, landscape and ecology of the area
- Improve quality and use of car park as part of investment in the former Sands public house building

Threats:

- Lack of investment in boardwalk could limit access in the future
- Further deterioration of the adjacent car park and Sands Pub could deter visitors from this part of the site

THEME: LANDMARKS

The Sands

Strengths:

- Prominence as a landmark on the Coastal Road
- Large, regular shaped site
- Adjacent car park offers potential for dedicated car parking as part of future use

Weaknesses:

- Building in disrepair
- Poor first impression of Coastal Gateway for visitors

Opportunities:

- Potential to treat façade as a temporary measure to improve appearance of Shore Road / Coastal Road Gateway
- Potential for refurbishment or redevelopment of building

Threats:

- Further deterioration of building may deter visitors and undermine wider regeneration efforts





Toad Hall

Strengths:

- Locally Designated Heritage Asset
- Building occupies a prominent location on the Promenade
- Wrap of building with mural of sand lizards has helped to create positive press coverage and highlight the ecology of the area

Weaknesses

- Building has been vacant for a long time. It provides no active frontage on to the Promenade
- Later additions to the building (such as the single storey rear extension) are unsympathetic
- Adjacent depot facility and Pontins do not provide a good setting for the building
- Space in front of Toad Hall currently fenced off to the public and does not contribute positively to the visitor experience of the Promenade
- Building is in poor condition, with cost of repair unviable

Opportunities:

- Explore options for viable redevelopment and replacement with a purpose built visitor reception facility

Threats:

- Further deterioration of building may deter visitors and undermine wider regeneration efforts in the Coastal Gateway

Pontins

Strengths:

- Large, developed site within the Green Belt
- Prominent road frontage to Shore Road and Coastal Road and highly visible part of the site

Weaknesses:

- The site is closed permanently
- The layout and architectural style of holiday park is dated and incongruous with its natural surroundings
- The layout is inward looking and poorly related to the environment around it
- Boundaries to the site are unattractive

Opportunities:

- Opportunity to develop the site to significantly improve the quality and appeal of visitor accommodation within the Coastal Gateway and the wider Sefton Coast
- Potential to improve the relationship of the site to its surroundings
- Scale of potential development / redevelopment opportunity could be a catalyst to regeneration of the wider Coastal Gateway

Threats:

- Further deterioration of building may deter visitors and undermine wider regeneration efforts in the Coastal Gateway
- Re-use of the site does not contribute to improving the quality or appeal of visitor accommodation and amenities, potentially undermining regeneration of the wider Coastal Gateway



THEME: AMENITIES

Amenities

Strengths:

- Recently refurbished toilet block close to beach
- The Beach House providing catering / outdoor refreshment
- Extensive nature trails and Coast Path providing opportunities for active lifestyles

Weaknesses:

- Lack of all weather / indoor space including dining
- Lack of visitor reception facilities / indoor coastal interpretation
- Lack of high quality visitor accommodation on site
- Absence of cycle storage and parking and sustainable infrastructure such as EV charging points
- Discovery centre not open to public and comprises a dated facility
- Lack of visitor accommodation (following closure of Pontins) and general poor quality of visitor accommodation

Opportunities:

- Co-location of indoor amenities could provide opportunities to create a high quality visitor facility
- Opportunity to enhance and modernize infrastructure as part of any redesign of the public realm
- Opportunity to develop a significantly higher quality and more appealing visitor accommodation offer on Pontins site



SUMMARY

Analysis of the site and the views expressed during previous rounds of consultation highlight the unique natural environmental and ecology of the Coastal Gateway. These strengths are key to the appeal of this part of the Sefton Coast to residents and visitors alike.

It is apparent that the visitor experience has deteriorated significantly in recent years with the closure of many of the Gateway's amenities. Ainsdale-on-Sea remains very popular with day visitors and experiences intense pressure on peak days but currently offers no visitor accommodation and relatively few visitor amenities such as parking, cycle and pedestrian infrastructure, indoor space or dining facilities. The poor quality of the built environment and lack of amenities detracts from the visitor experience and negatively impacts on impressions of this part of the Sefton Coast.

There is a clear opportunity for visitor pressures to be better managed, and for Ainsdale-on-Sea to grow its' appeal to a wider range of visitors (including day and overnight visitors) through a co-ordinated approach to regeneration in the Gateway. This has the potential to create lasting social, economic and environmental benefits locally and within the wider borough.



04 ECOVISION: NATURE LED REGENERATION

There have been many visions for Ainsdale-on-Sea in the last two hundred years. The Victorian speculative vision of a new resort on the coast was never fully realised. Nor were the ambitions to create a "Garden Seaside Village".

The municipal vision which led to the creation of the lido was also short lived, affected by the shifting sands of public taste and new freedoms brought about by the motor car.

The private sector's vision of affordable family fun by the sea, typified by the development of the Pontins holiday camp in the late 1960s has recently come to an abrupt end with the park's permanent closure.

Ainsdale-on-Sea's decline has been long and slow, with each closure and unrealised vision inflicting scars on the place and the way it functions. Despite all this, it remains a popular destination attracting many visitors year round.

It was only relatively recently (the second half of the 20th Century) that the value and importance of Ainsdale-on-Sea's nature, its landscape and seascape was recognised and protection afforded to it through environmental designations and policy. It is not only unique in a UK context but also internationally, with the dune ecosystem being rarer than the rainforest. This ecosystem supports an abundance of life and the constantly evolving dune landscape also has an important role to play in coastal defence.

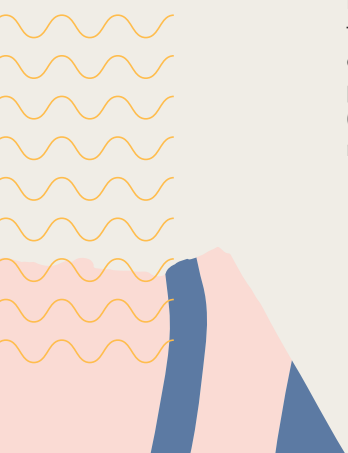
The increasingly severe effects of climate change mean that there is a heightened awareness of the impacts of human activities on the natural environment and nature. People are starting to change their behaviour – thinking more about their own impacts on the planet and the choices that they can make.

Spending time in nature has well documented physical and mental health benefits. It was no coincidence that as Covid-19 lockdowns eased, many people yearned to spend time in nature and visit places such as Ainsdale-on-Sea.

Ainsdale-on-Sea's most important feature, and the very foundation for existing as a place, is nature. Putting nature at the centre of a new vision is therefore imperative.

THROUGH ALL THESE CHANGES ONE THING HAS REMAINED CONSTANT...

Consistent throughout time, changes in public tastes, changing markets and the fortunes of businesses has been one factor which continues to draw people to Ainsdale-on-Sea; nature (and more generally being in the natural environment).



Vision Statement:



Ainsdale-on-Sea's unique nature, landscape and seascape will be protected and enhanced for the benefit of current and future generations to explore, discover and enjoy. Nature will provide the inspiration and distinctive focus for regeneration of the visitor offer leading to sustainable tourism and a world class accommodation-led offer.

REGENERATION

ECOVISION

WORLD CLASS



EXPERIENCE

SION

NATURE



ECOVISION OBJECTIVES

Seven thematic objectives have been created in order to inform the types of activities, investments and improvements that will be sought through delivery of EcoVision.

1

Objective 1 Nature: Protect and enhance the unique nature, landscape and seascape of the area

2

Objective 2 Climate: Provide opportunities for low carbon lifestyles and tourism through regeneration

3

Objective 3 Inclusivity and Equity: Deliver an accessible, safe and inclusive place through regeneration

4

Objective 4 Prosperity and Wellbeing: Create opportunities for employment, skills, training and volunteering linked to the EcoVision themes of nature and regeneration

5

Objective 5 Knowledge: Create opportunities for interpretation of nature, the landscape and seascape of the area

6

Objective 6 Connection: Enhance connectivity to local communities and improve sustainable access for visitors

7

Objective 7 Deliver a World Class Visitor Experience: Develop visitor reception facilities, enhanced amenities and a high quality visitor accommodation offer that maximises the contribution the site can make to the sustainable development of Sefton's economy

“

A BREEZE WAS BLOWING, AND I
COULD SMELL SALT, SEAWEED, AND
SUN-BLEACHED SHORE. I KNEW, ONCE
AGAIN, THAT I'D FOUND HOME.

Sue Hubbell, *Waiting for Aphrodite*



05 SPATIAL FRAMEWORK AND CHARACTER AREAS

In order to make sense of what the vision means for Ainsdale-on-Sea, a spatial framework plan has been prepared. This illustrates how the Coastal Gateway might be thought about as a series of inter-connected character areas – each serving a distinct function and working well together to deliver the vision and a world class visitor experience.

Return to Nature

Relax - Socialise -

Promenade Piazza

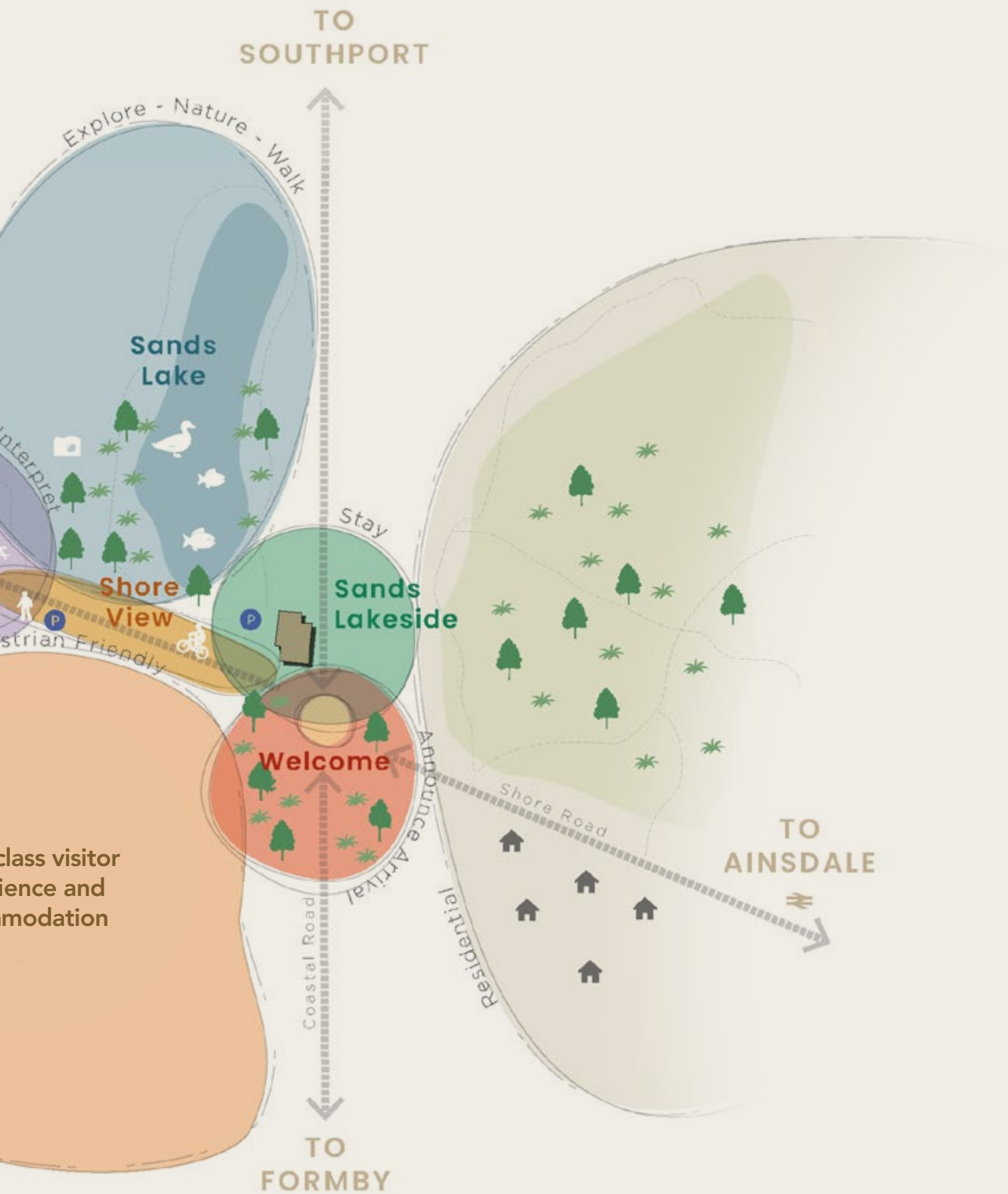
Visitor centre

Pede

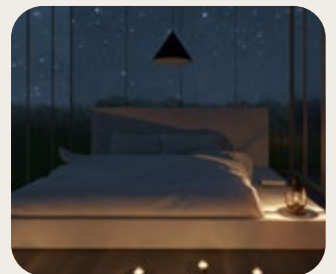
Promenade Parking

World class
exper
accom

Regreening



THE CHARACTER AREAS ARE:



World Class Visitor Experience and Accommodation

The former Pontins site occupies a critical position in the Coastal Gateway. The size, prominence and visibility of the site to a large extent defines the current degraded character of the built environment and offers the most potential for improvement of the Gateway.

Development of this site, aligned to the EcoVision and its' objectives is key to regenerating the whole Coastal Gateway. It provides the largest single development sites on the Sefton Coast and an opportunity to develop a much higher quality visitor accommodation and experience.

Given the outstanding natural setting there is the opportunity to deliver new high quality visitor accommodation, attracting visitors from national and international markets and, boosting overnight and longer stays on the Sefton Coast.

This in turn will contribute to the wider efforts to regenerate Sefton's visitor economy by attracting more visitors and enhancing spending with a wide array of local businesses across the borough.

Enhancing the supply and quality of visitor accommodation will also contribute to Sefton being able to attract and sustain more visitor events with all the associated benefits for spending with businesses, local employment and prosperity.

The vision for this part of the site is one of a world class visitor experience and accommodation offer. There is the opportunity to target developing a 5* + accommodation along with a high quality F&B offer, spa and wellbeing facilities as part of a resort concept. The development of all-weather visitor amenities as part of this concept will directly improve the appeal of the Coastal Gateway and sustain visitors throughout the year.

The quality which is aspired to will be distinctive in local and regional visitor markets, capitalizing on the unique landscape setting, abundant nature and direct access to the beach that only Ainsdale-on-Sea offers.

Realising the quality that is aspired to is integral to delivery of the vision for the wider Coastal Gateway.



The Welcome

This character area is located at the meeting point of Coastal Road and Shore Road and is currently configured as a large roundabout with public art ("The Shore Road Roundabout"). For many visitors, this provides their first impressions of Ainsdale-on-Sea. It is an important gateway to the area and is currently dominated by fast moving traffic (travelling at speeds of up to 50 mph), a lack of pedestrian and cyclist priority crossings and a large amount of roadspace / inefficient use of land.

This area could be reconfigured in the future to provide dedicated signalised crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists, new gateway public art and signage and to reclaim inefficiently use space from the current roundabout.



Artists impression of The Welcome ▲



Artists impression of Shore View ▲

Shore View

Visitors arriving by Coastal Road from the south are afforded their very first view of the Sefton Coast from this part of the site. As such it is a significant “arrival point” on the Sefton Coast.

This character area stretches from The Sands to the northern elevation of Toad Hall. The character area is currently “urban” in look and feel, with large areas of tarmac, the entrance to Pontins, security fencing, a turning circle and on street car parking.

Potential enhancements in this area could include a redesigned pedestrian friendly Shore Road to calm traffic, more efficiently used road space to provide additional car parking, public realm enhancements and features to enhance the sense of arrival at the coast.

Sands Lakeside

The former Sands public house and the adjacent public car park comprise this character area. The Sands is a prominent vacant building on the Coastal Road approach. It is envisaged that in delivering the vision, this character area provides opportunities for sustainable visitor accommodation (e.g. a new hotel) and associated dining facilities, along with associated car parking for patrons. There are opportunities to create a better relationship between the Sands and Sands Lake by enhancement of the existing car park and natural surveillance from the western elevation of the building, as well as the potential for outside dining facing westward towards the Sands Lake and shore.

Sands Lake

The Sands Lake comprises a distinct character area, inland from the dunes and screened from view by mature vegetation. The Lake is currently not readily identifiable or signposted to visitors as part of the visitor experience. Enhancements in this area could include improved signage and wayfinding to and around the lake, along with renovation to the boardwalk around the lake, and interpretative information to assist visitors in understanding the origins of the lake and the variety of wildlife than it supports.

Promenade Piazza

This character area includes Toad Hall and the section of the Promenade in front of it, the Green Sefton Maintenance Depot next to Toad Hall, the section of road where Shore Road meets the beach, along with the toilet block (currently being refurbished) and The Beach House catering operation.

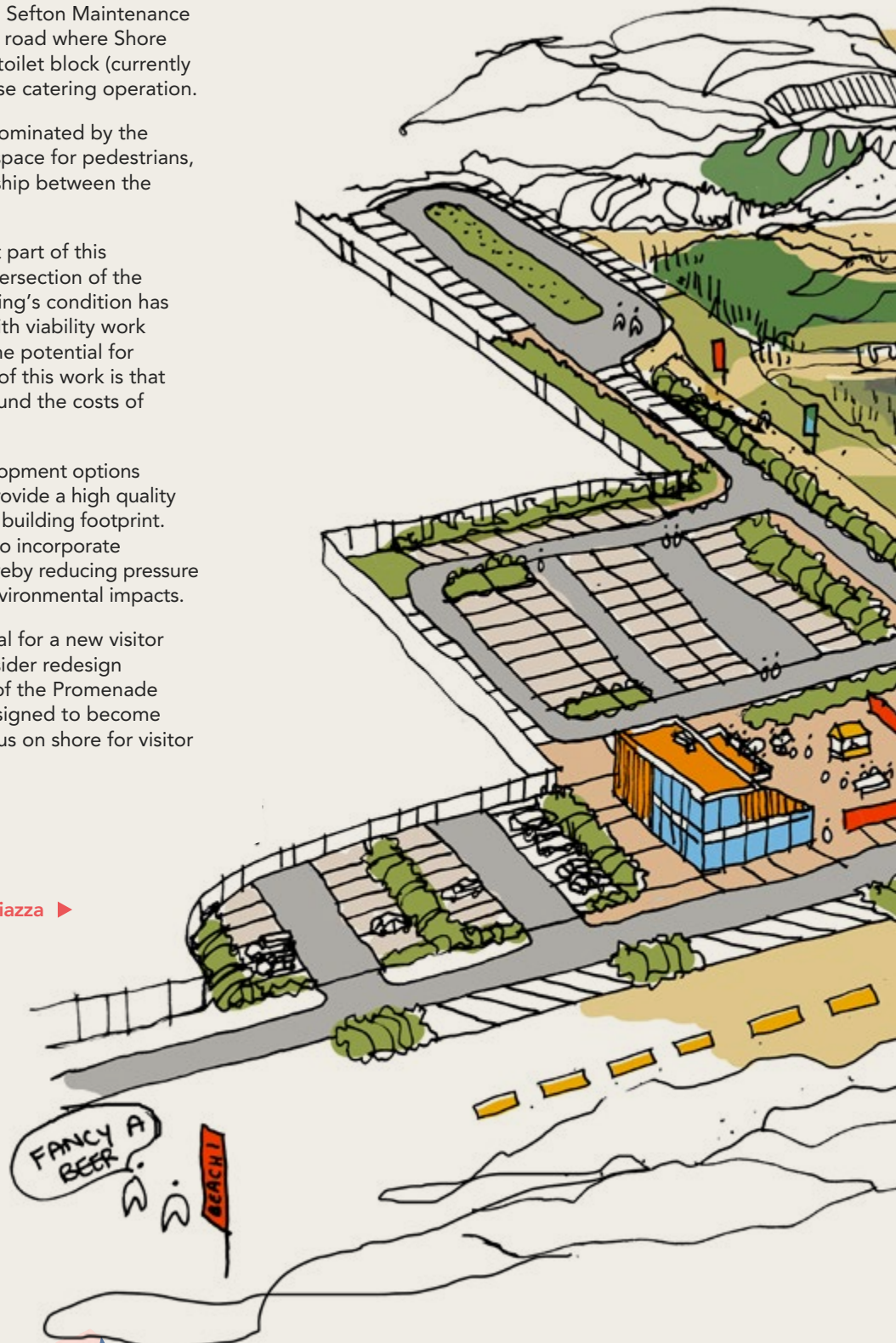
The character of this area is currently dominated by the amount of road space, relative lack of space for pedestrians, lack of public space, and poor relationship between the buildings in this part of the site.

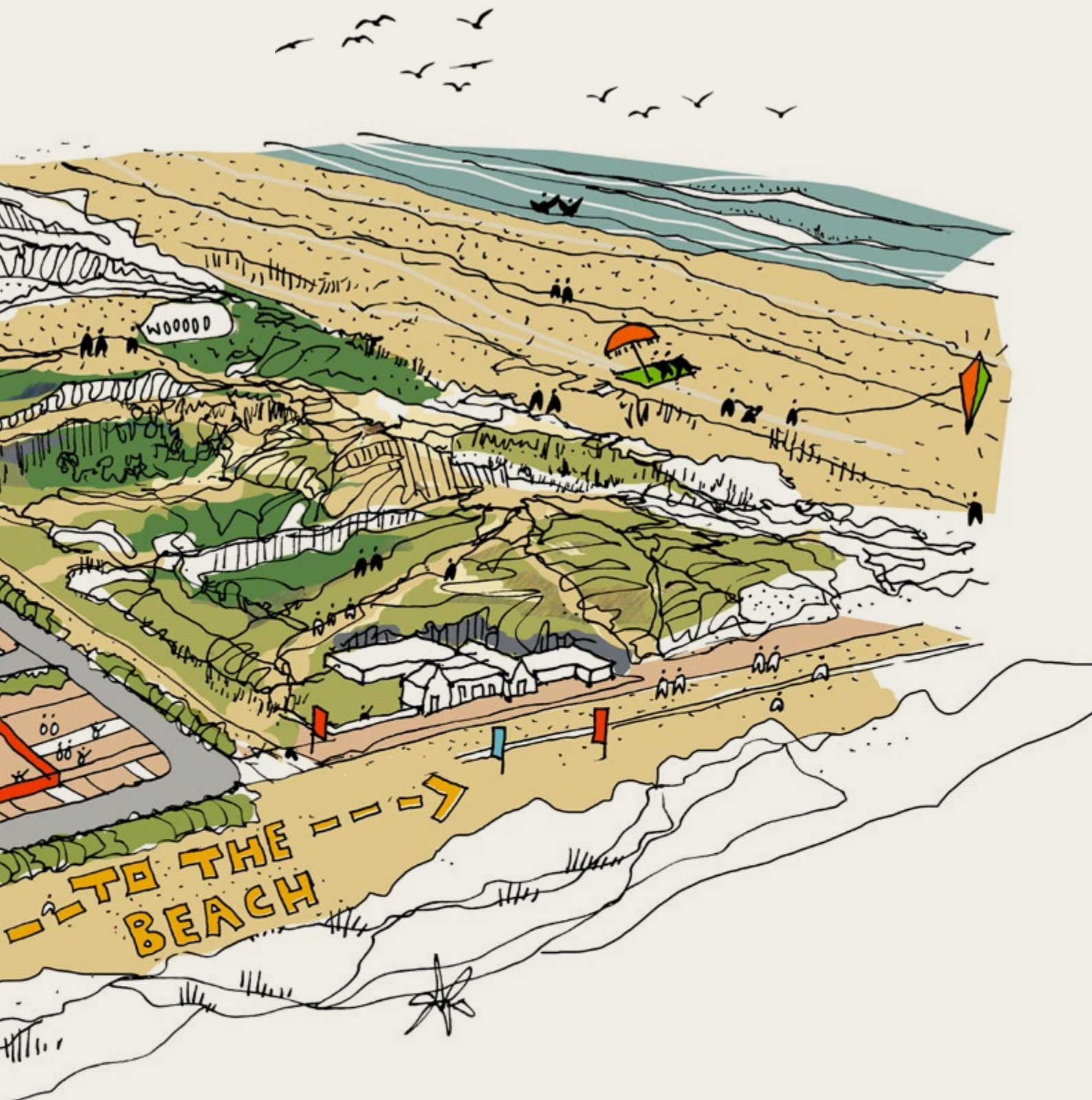
Toad Hall occupies the most prominent part of this character area, being located at the intersection of the Promenade and Shore Road. The building's condition has been independently assessed, along with viability work commissioned by the council to examine potential for restoration and re-use. The conclusion of this work is that a viable use cannot be found that will fund the costs of restoration and re-use.

There is the potential to look at redevelopment options for Toad Hall, with the opportunity to provide a high quality purpose built visitor centre on a smaller building footprint. This could also provide an opportunity to incorporate a new area of on-shore car parking, thereby reducing pressure on beach car parking and associated environmental impacts.

Alongside consideration of the potential for a new visitor centre, there is the opportunity to consider redesign of the public realm at the intersection of the Promenade and Coastal Road. This could be redesigned to become a "Promenade Piazza", providing a focus on shore for visitor activities and a meeting point.

Artists impression of The Promenade Piazza ►





Promenade Parking

This character area comprises The Promenade, Green Sefton's depot, The Discovery Centre, Green Sefton's offices and small visitor car park. The area looks and feels fragmented, with the buildings, spaces and car parking poorly related to one another. It is the most secluded part of the site and lacks natural surveillance from the surrounding buildings.

The Promenade comprises a narrow pedestrian footpath alongside Pontins high security fencing. There are no buildings fronting on to the Promenade and the route is not overlooked at ground floor level.

There is the opportunity in this area to reconfigure the Promenade to incorporate more parking on street and to upgrade the quality of the pedestrian route to Shore Road.

There is also an opportunity to relocate Green Sefton's office functions into a purpose built visitor centre and adjacent to their existing depot facility. This could potentially free up their existing office site for the creation of dedicated onshore parking.



Return to Nature

"The Return to Nature" character area comprises the area of the beach that is currently used for car parking at certain times of the year.

The suggested interventions described above are designed to make more efficient use of existing road space and previously developed land to provide additional off-beach parking. This will help to provide car parking capacity in the event that the beach can no longer be used for parking at some point in the future.



PRECEDENT IMAGES

In order to illustrate the range and type of interventions included within the EcoVision, a series of precedent images has been compiled and is presented in this section. These are examples of how similar interventions have been delivered in other coastal locations and are not meant to represent designed or literal solutions for Ainsdale-on-Sea.

PROMENADE/FRONTAGE





PRECEDENT IMAGES

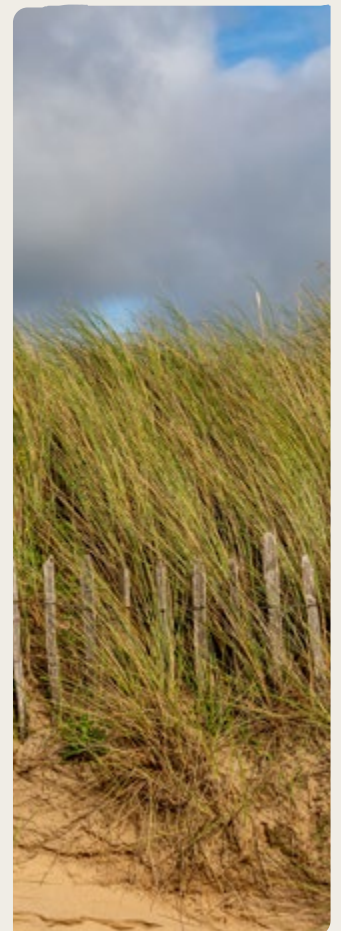
PATHS





PRECEDENT IMAGES

BOUNDARIES



SEATING



PRECEDENT IMAGES

PARKING



FEATURES



“

LEFT MY SOUL THERE, DOWN BY THE SEA

Skye Edwards, Ross Godfrey and Paul Godfrey





