

Your vision for the Solway Firth 2050 Workshop Report

Prepared by
Aster de Vries Lentsch, STREAMLINE Research
November 2018



Introduction

This report summarises the findings of the “Your vision for the Solway Firth 2050” marine planning workshop held at the Solway AONB Joint conference in Carlisle on the 2nd of November 2018.

The aim of the workshop was to provide a broad cross-border group of stakeholders with an enjoyable and engaging interaction with marine planning, and secondly to gather data on preferred landscape uses and management of the Solway Firth by 2050. These findings will feed into the MMO North West Marine Plan, its vision for the North West and the SMILE project, and will also be shared with Marine Scotland.

The workshop was comprised of five groups of between 4 and 6 people (26 people in total), all stakeholders representing organisations or residents from both sides of the Solway. The workshop was based on the Streamline format, using colourful laminated canvasses to explore different aspects of the future Solway. The core findings of the workshop are outlined below, followed by the results per canvas, and concluded by feedback from participants and lessons learned.

Solway 2050 - A working seascape of outstanding natural beauty

- Protecting the environment and providing jobs emerged time and again as the two core priorities for the Solway by 2050 across groups and canvasses.
- Collaboration, cross border cooperation and working in partnership were emphasised as vital to the success of any marine plan.
- There is an appetite across groups for community involvement in decision making around the Solway, particularly on local/regional levels and with a focus on deliberation and broad representation of views.

Canvas I – Home

The “Home” canvas served primarily as a warming up exercise. The main take-away messages are that participants emphasized the need for mixed communities, bringing together different ages, especially highlighting the need to attract young families to the Solway area. There was a clear preference for living in coastal areas, particularly in small towns and villages, with a mix of housing types. Some participants highlighted the need to improve (both in terms of renovate and make more sustainable) much of the existing and sometimes derelict housing stock in the area. A garden, eco-friendly specifications and affordability were all seen as core features of houses in the future, followed by proximity to the outdoors and sea views or access to the shore.

Canvas II – Activities and Uses

The activities most cited by groups as what they would like to be doing on the Solway coast by 2050 were (in no particular order):

fishing/hunting, enjoying wildlife, enjoying views & sunsets, water sports and social recreation. The cohort of runners-up included (dog)walking, exercise, enjoying cultural heritage, work, and getting away from it all.



The mixture of active (sports & exercise) and reflective activities (enjoying views & getting away from it all) indicates that the Solway would be a very important contributor to people’s physical and mental wellbeing.



In the second part of this canvas, participants were asked what the Solway coast should provide for the community by 2050, in other words, what its main uses should be.

All groups agreed sustaining habitat and wildlife and providing space for recreation were key shoreline functions, closely followed in importance by providing jobs, and clean air and water.

Furthermore, participants emphasized that many of the uses were interlinked and supportive of each other. Particularly mitigating climate change, clean air and water and sustaining habitats were seen as feeding into each other as well as supporting recreation, jobs and fishing.

Similarly, providing jobs was highlighted as a priority, underpinned by activities such as renewable energy, sustainable fishing, transport of goods and people and attracting tourism.



This suggests the North West Marine Plan would benefit from paying special attention to potential synergies and creating positive feedback loops between activities in the area.

Q: What does the coast provide for your community?	# out of 5
Sustain habitats & wildlife	5
Space for recreation	5
Provide jobs	4
Clean air and water	4

Table 1: Overview of preferred uses of Solway shoreline by 2050

Only three groups completed the weighting exercise of coastal and sea uses: one group weighted all their uses equal, one highlighted providing jobs, and the final group strongly emphasised climate change mitigation as a key concern (assigning it 80 out of 100 points)

In the final part of this canvas, groups were asked to rate their agreement with the extent to which they hoped the sea and coast would help them to achieve certain wellbeing outcomes. There was strong agreement that by 2050 the coast and sea should help

1. Stay healthy & keep active
2. Help take care of the environment and wildlife in your area
3. Feel better if you’re upset or worried about something

Groups were more divided about whether the Solway by 2050 would help them ‘get involved in their community or feel like you are part of a group’, and/or ‘learn new things and discover activities or hobbies’, although these were nevertheless rated mostly neutral to positive.

Canvas III – My Shoreline

The third canvas introduced a series of potential improvements or developments on the shoreline by 2050, and asked participants to sort them into ideas they were enthusiastic about (“Yes please”), were opposed to (“No thanks”) or were not particularly bothered about either way (“Not Fussed”). Based on the results summarised in Figure 3, we conclude that there is:

- Unanimous support for:
 - Improved access to the shore via public transport
 - Thriving fishing community
 - Marine reserve(s) in the Solway
 - Litter-free beaches (though there was some debate on whether these should be community or centrally maintained)
 - Undeveloped stretches of coastline
 - Strong community involvement in what happens on the coastline
 - Maintained coastal footpaths
 - Thriving coastal and marine nature and wildlife.
- Strong support for
 - Improved disability access
 - Piers, boat and thriving marinas

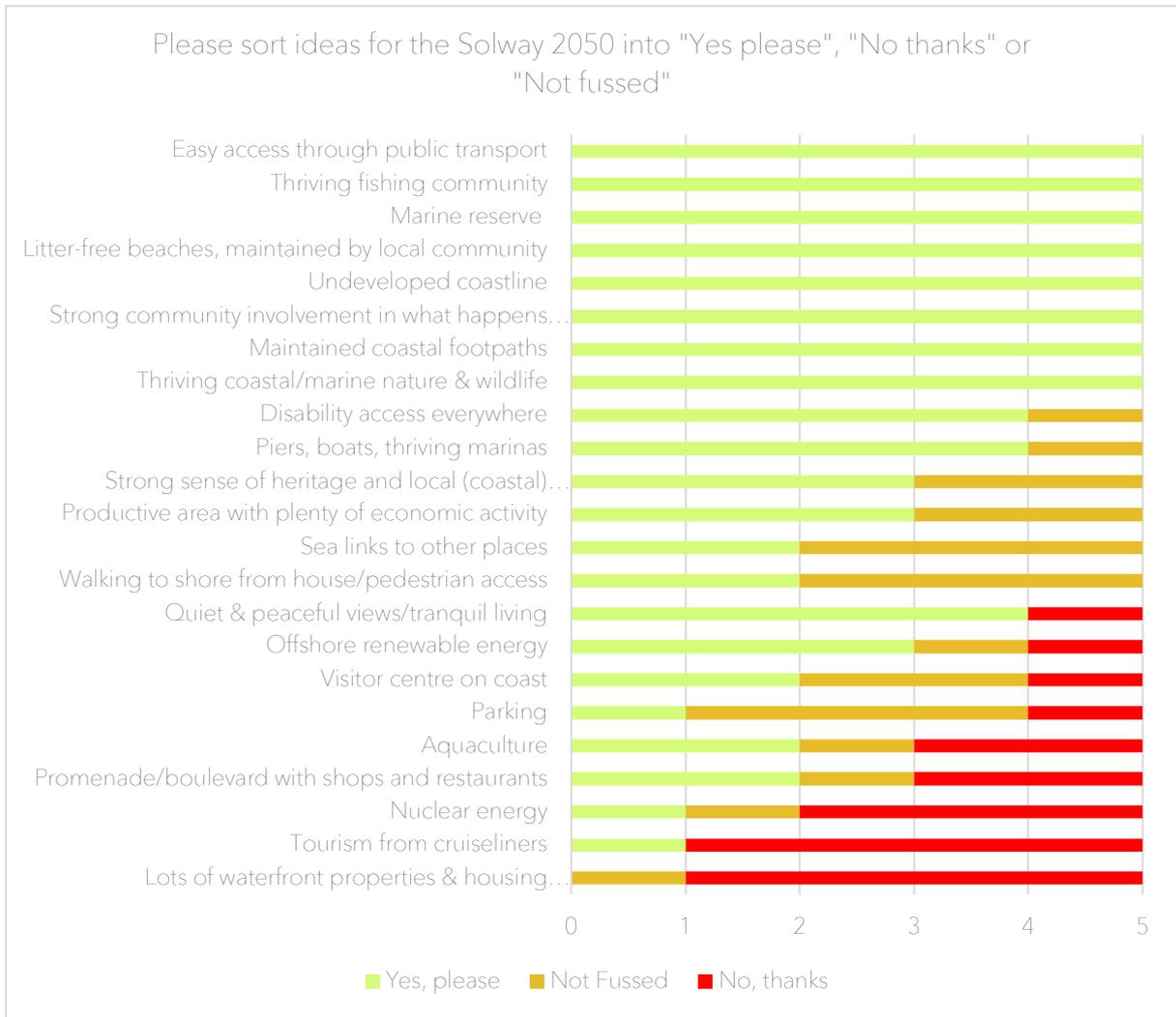


Figure 1: Summary of results for "My Shoreline" canvas

- Strong sense of coastal heritage and pride
- Productive areas with plenty of economic activity
- Sea links to other places
- Pedestrian access to the shore
- Quiet & peaceful views, tranquil living
- Mixed reception but some support for:
 - Offshore renewable energy
 - Visitor centre on the coast
 - More parking
 - Aquaculture
 - Promenades with shops and restaurants
- Opposition and mixed feelings towards
 - Nuclear energy
 - Tourism from cruise-liners
 - Lots of waterfront properties and housing developments

Nuclear energy in particular sparked debate within groups. Some were not fussed but acknowledged that others would have strong feelings about it, some were strongly opposed, and a few participants were in favour on account of the jobs provided by the existing nuclear industry in the area.

There are indications that support for some of the ideas listed in Figure 1 is at least in part conditional. For example, groups cited the need for technological improvements in aquaculture to make it more sustainable; for fishing to be done sustainably as well; and for shops and cafes to serve as "honeypot" attractions that

can draw visitors away from vulnerable nature areas.

Ideas proposed by participants on other canvases worth mentioning here included a network of coastal walks linking up villages along the Solway Firth and developing carbon capture and storage along the coast, combined the maintenance of raised peat bogs as carbon sinks.

Participants also made it clear they did not want all of these things in all places everywhere. Clearly, if any ideas are taken forward in the marine plan, further stakeholder engagement will be vital to designate suitable areas.

Lastly, it is worth noting that some of the measures that received unanimous support can be seen as both synergies or trade-offs. For example, if well-managed, marine reserves, nature & wildlife and local fishing communities could in theory all thrive by supporting and feeding into each other, but this requires long-term investments in stakeholder involvement to build trust between the various interest groups, or risk becoming a source of serious conflict.

Canvas IV – Making it work

On the penultimate canvas of the workshop participants were asked to set out how the vision they had built so far should be put into practice.



Four out of five groups indicated the need for all actors to be involved in the process, from individual members of the community and SMEs to big companies and government departments or agencies. One group however preferred to exclude private landowners, bigger companies, charities and the council from the decision-making process, for various reasons.

Groups were a bit more divided about funding, but national subsidies (from taxes), contributions from developers, and grants bodies were cited as sources of financial support by all four groups who had completed the exercise. One

group could not reach consensus. In addition, tourist tax and council tax found favour with three groups.

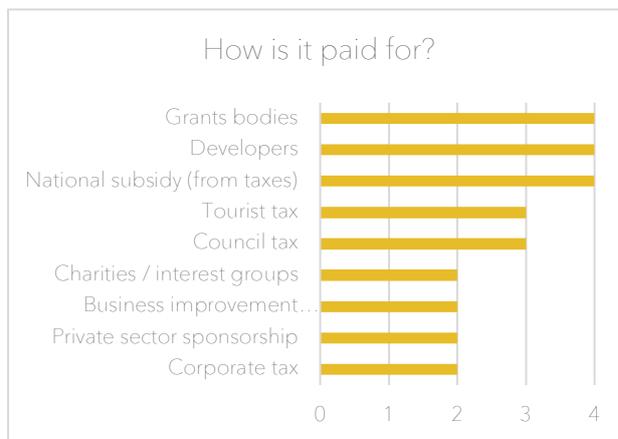


Figure 2: Funding sources for managing the Solway coast

When asked how they wanted to be engaged in marine planning, groups favoured mostly local and regional scales of engagement, through stakeholder consultation, local chosen representatives, local community organisations & steering groups and by responding to regional plans (only one group was interested in responding to national level plans). It is worth noting that these are mostly “traditional” forms of stakeholder engagement, but two groups said they would (also) like to be engaged through social media and online polls, and by voting on proposals.

In terms of roles and the process of decision-making and implementation, participants stressed the importance of collaboration, working in partnerships, cross boundary co-operation, co-creative processes and not working in isolation as vital to any vision implementation. One group stipulated the need for a plan from a coordinating body with broad representation, which operates at an arms-length from government, providing for local representation, with a scope from the strategic (national) level down to local specifics, and ensuring cross-border co-operation.

Overall the contributions on this canvas indicate a strong appetite for intensive community engagement in marine planning for the Solway, focused on deliberation and a broad representation of views.

Canvas V – Legacy

The final canvas in the series invited participants to consider what by 2050 would be left behind. When asked to circle words describing the Solway area by 2050, all groups listed “clean”, “protecting the environment”, “healthy”, and “varied” as core aspirations.

Most popular words (cited by 5 out of 5)	2 nd most popular (cited by 4 out of 5)
Clean	Exciting
Protecting the environment	Enjoyable
Healthy	Successful
Varied	Creative
	Ambitious
	Law abiding

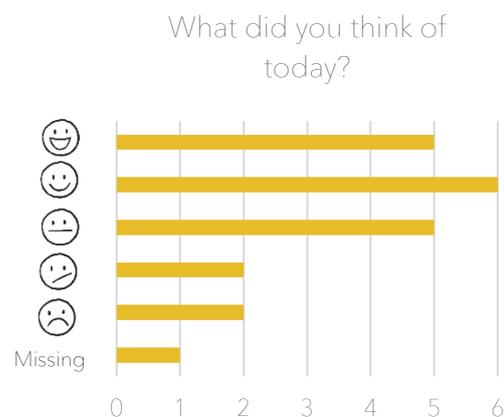
All groups hoped their children and the next generation would want to live in coastal villages and towns in the North West by 2050. Throughout the discussions many (older) participants expressed the hope that the young ones would have all the opportunities they themselves had to travel and settle where they pleased, but that there would hopefully also be a good enough quality of living, both environmentally and economically speaking, to return to the Solway area in due course.

Finally according to participants the Solway would ideally be famous for its sense of

community & cooperative spirit and its wildlife and nature by 2050, along with its recreational opportunities and quality of living (Figure 3).

Feedback & Lessons learned

Overall the workshop was well received. 21 out of 26 participants filled out a feedback form at the end of the session and of these, more than half rated the experience very positively or positively. Five people rated it neutral and 4 rated it negative to very negative. One rating was missing but written feedback suggested a negative review.



However, all of the negative feedback stemmed from a single group, which due to a mix of group dynamics, time constraints and resistance to the format had a challenging experience throughout the workshop.

Group facilitators faced a bit of an uphill battle as none of them had worked with the canvas format before, so they had to juggle familiarising themselves with the novel approach as well as managing group dynamics and note-taking. As it is not feasible to hire a full cohort of professional facilitators for every stakeholder event, it would be worthwhile for future exercises to invest in a training session ahead of an event. Taking the time to familiarise facilitators with workshop design and potential issues will always pay itself out in terms of the quality of engagement on the day itself. Such a training can be tied in with wider capacity building around stakeholder engagement and qualitative data gathering among staff within hosting and partnership organisations.

Another lesson that can be drawn from the participants’ written feedback, is that deliberative

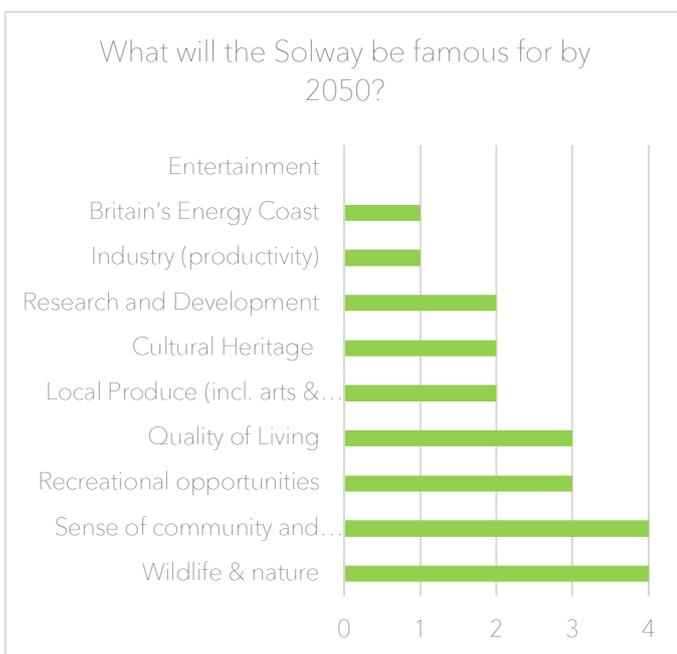


Figure 3: Future USPs for the Solway, as cited by workshop groups. NB: Only four groups completed this exercise.

and visioning exercises such as these are best done at the start of an engagement process, rather than midway as was the case here. Underlying some participants' critiques seemed to be a desire at this point in the proceedings to be talking about more "nuts and bolts" aspects and trade-offs within the marine plan, and verbally some expressed frustration that this type of visioning exercise hadn't been done at the very start of the process.

Having said that, the majority of participants and all facilitators reported back positively. Furthermore, the impassioned debates sparked by the session and the fact that 15 out of 26 participants signed up for future stakeholder events and marine planning updates suggest that the workshop was successful in engaging people in marine planning, as well as gathering robust data on a variety of topics in a relative short amount of time.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the facilitators who generously donated their time to help out with the workshop and were crucial to the success of the event.

Contact

If you have any questions about the report or would like to know more about this and other stakeholder engagement events, please get in touch via e-mail

aster@streamline-research.com

Or through our website:

www.streamline-research.com

For information on the Solway Firth Partnership and the SMILE project, please visit:

<http://www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk/>

More information on the North West Marine Plan and marine planning in England can be accessed via the Marine Management Organisation website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation>