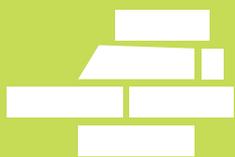


Understanding Corby

A Social Sustainability Assessment

January 2019



About the project

Bright Future is an ESRC-funded project in association with JPI-Europe, working with people in small and medium industrial towns in Europe to explore their socioeconomic characteristics, qualities and underlying resilience. The research will feed into practical ideas and policy recommendations geared towards supporting industrial towns to thrive into the future.

About the project partners

Social Life and The Young Foundation are working in partnership on Bright Future. This report has been authored by Claire Gordon, Nicola Bacon and Mary Hodgson.

Social Life is an independent research organisation that aims to put people at the heart of places. We work with local authorities, developers and local community groups in the UK and across the globe to find practical ways to build stronger communities. For more information visit www.social-life.co

The Young Foundation aims to develop better connected and more sustainable communities across the UK. We are a multi-disciplinary team, bringing together research, investment, innovation and community development. Our programmes cover a range of themes including: place-based work, health and wellbeing, inequality and support for young people. For more information visit www.young-foundation.org

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all those who generously offered their time and input to this research, we are very grateful for the insights and perspectives that have been shared.

Introduction

This assessment presents a picture of how Corby is faring as a place to live, work and grow for its residents. It examines the town's features through the lens of Social Life's 'social sustainability framework' - created to capture the different elements needed for places to thrive. The framework is organised into four dimensions - amenities & social infrastructure, social & cultural life, voice & influence, and adaptability & resilience. We identify both the aspects in which Corby is doing relatively well, and areas where there are gaps or weaknesses.

The exercise brings together familiar metrics such as employment and health indicators through which the performance of places is commonly measured, alongside perceptions of local life from people who live and work in the town. This includes their views on topics ranging from the town's social fabric to its sense of identity - features which are often overlooked in policymaking but which are key components of individual and community wellbeing.

The assessment will provide a point of departure to reflect on Corby's future during the next stages of our Bright Future project, where through a series of workshops we will support local people to develop ideas for practical solutions to address some of the town's challenges - a 'social innovation process' which is being run in parallel by our project partners in industrial towns in Finland, the Netherlands, Romania and Slovenia. We hope it may also offer local agencies and organisations an analysis which could help inform and support their own work.

This report first sets out our overall social sustainability assessment, then highlights the key strengths and weaknesses identified through the research and our reflections on what it means for Corby. We then set out the complete findings relating to each of the four social sustainability dimensions.

What is our assessment based on?

This social sustainability assessment brings together voices and information from research undertaken in Corby in 2018. It draws on four main sources:

- **40 interviews with local residents and stakeholders** including individuals involved in local business, politics and Corby's civic sector, as well as residents from different walks of life. Interviews were predominantly held in person, with a small number conducted by phone. The interviews explored local narratives and have been summarised in the report ["Corby in its own words"](#).
- **Seven supplementary interviews with agencies** carried out to inform this social sustainability assessment.
- **Understanding Corby workshop** held in Corby in November 2018, which brought together 24 participants, many actively involved in initiatives shaping the town. In small groups, participants shared their perspectives on Corby's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the four dimensions of social sustainability set out in this assessment.
- **Data from secondary sources**, including official data on employment, education, crime and health.

What is social sustainability?

Social sustainability sits alongside economic and environmental sustainability as a pillar of sustainable development. It places individual and community wellbeing at the heart of thinking about how we create successful places. In doing so, it recognises the importance of the less tangible elements of local life, such as voice, identity, and neighbourliness, alongside local services and amenities.

At Social Life, we define social sustainability as:

“A process for creating sustainable, successful places that promote wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work. Social sustainability combines design of the physical realm with design of the social world - infrastructure to support social and cultural life, social amenities, systems for citizen engagement and space for people and places to evolve.”¹

Social Life has developed a framework for thinking about the different components of social sustainability. This grew out of a commission from the Homes and Communities Agency to bring together evidence about what makes places thrive. The framework has been used in the UK and internationally to develop local strategies and measure the impact of place-based change.

Four dimensions of social sustainability



Amenities & social infrastructure

Includes amenities and services such as education, healthcare, and transport, as well as other spaces, services, events and activities that cater to the needs of all residents and enable collective community life.



Social & cultural life

The less tangible elements of local life, including how residents feel about the place they live, relationships between residents and groups, quality of life, wellbeing, local identity and feelings of safety.



Voice & influence

Residents' sense of control and their ability and willingness to take action to shape their town. Includes confidence in agencies, local activism and the existence of forums where residents' voices can be heard.



Adaptability & resilience

Capacity of residents, services and infrastructure to adapt to changing circumstances. This includes traditions of innovations, collaborative practices, and local work opportunities and skills levels.



Social Sustainability in Corby: our assessment

Social sustainability in Corby

Here we provide an overall assessment for each dimension of social sustainability, highlighting whether the Corby's performance can be considered 'strong', 'expected', 'weak' or 'polarised' (that is, where both significant strengths and weaknesses are present). The assessment is intended to be a tool for planning and ideas development rather than a definitive verdict on the town - focusing attention to where the town is doing well, as well as local challenges.

The next page sets out the key strengths and weaknesses we identified in relation to each of the four dimensions of the social sustainability framework, upon which this assessment is based.

The complete findings on each dimension can be found in the following section of the report, which sets out the data collected through the workshop, interviews and secondary sources.

Social sustainability in Corby: an overall assesment



Amenities & social infrastructure



Social & cultural life



Voice & influence



Adaptability & resilience



Key strengths

Key weaknesses

Amenities & social infrastructure



Expected/
weak

- The renewed town centre and its amenities are highly valued by residents and are a source of pride.
- Local green space and woodlands considered key assets and provide important spaces for social interaction.
- There is an increasingly vibrant arts and cultural sector in the town and a range of community events which are distinct to Corby.
- There are a reasonable number of community venues for different groups.

- Public transport does not meet the needs of all residents, particularly those working on the outskirts of the town and people with mobility problems.
- Many children and young people are in struggling schools where educational outcomes are below the national average.
- Services and health infrastructure are under pressure as a result of housing growth and public sector austerity.
- There are a lack of leisure and educational opportunities for Corby's young people.

Social & cultural life



Strong/
expected

- There are considered to be strong social supports within the longstanding community.
- Corby people are considered compassionate, generous and friendly and there is felt to be significant community spirit in the town.
- A strong sense of local identity and belonging is linked to the town's Scottish connections, which for many residents accounts for Corby's distinctive sense of place.
- Corby offers a good quality of life for families, because of its open spaces, accessible amenities and relatively affordable housing.

- Corby still suffers from a poor reputation, at odds with how many residents experience the town.
- There is considered to be little integration between longer-standing communities and foreign migrants and there are reports of discrimination and hostility.
- Wellbeing is impacted by high levels of poverty in the town, health issues and isolation.

Voice & influence



Strong/
expected

- Corby Borough Council is well regarded by many local residents.
- There is a history of industrial action and activism and an ongoing tradition of local campaigning and petitioning.
- Many residents are willing to participate in consultations or share their feelings informally through online groups.
- A core of active residents are involved in social action and are collaborating in many initiatives shaping the town today.

- Corby Borough Council is felt to be less approachable than in previous years and there has been a decline in citizen involvement in decision-making.
- The unitary council proposal may weaken residents' political representation, there is already significant distrust around the plans.
- A lack of engagement among young people and a lack of youth voice are a key issue.

Adaptability & resilience



Polarised

- Corby has embraced growth and been open to change at an institutional level.
- Agencies and citizens have acquired experience of recovery, joint-working and drawing in external resources in the years since the steelworks closure.
- The diversification of local employers has increased economic resilience, and economic growth is currently being driven by small and medium enterprises.
- Corby has been successful at building housing and attracting new residents.

- The unitary council plans are likely to make it more difficult to devise and implement locally-relevant policies.
- There are low skills levels, and low aspirations and confidence among many young people, while few high-skilled opportunities locally mean many university graduates do not return to the town.
- Many local jobs are poorly paid, insecure, and considered vulnerable to automation.
- Potential immigration restrictions after Brexit could affect many local employers.

Our reflections

The Corby of today is often framed by two distinct narratives. One highlights the revival of the town, its “phoenix-like” growth and regeneration since the closure of the steelworks. The other frames the town as a site of enduring social ills linked to high levels of poverty. This assessment goes beyond these reductive narratives, seeking to create a portrait of Corby in the round.

For many, the defining feature of the town are its people - their friendliness, their generosity, their frankness. Many comment on how local social relationships are strong and provide vital networks of support. However, while some residents embrace Corby's increasingly multicultural population, some foreign migrants have encountered hostility and discrimination. This echoes the experience of other industrial towns in Europe studied in this project, where the shared associations created through an earlier, dominant industry, are still evident in the strength of social relationships today. Yet this very closeness and cohesion can pose challenges when new groups of residents arrive.

Corby has been proactive and successful in developing strategies for population growth and town centre regeneration. This has helped reanimate the town and Corby's new amenities, are a source of pride for many. It also marks Corby apart from many other industrial towns in Europe which have experienced declining or stagnating populations. However, increasing numbers of residents from different social backgrounds could also generate growing inequality. Disparities are already visible in the local education system, some secondary schools are thriving while others struggle, and new housing is felt to be inaccessible and unaffordable to many long-term Corby residents on low incomes.

The growth of small and medium sized businesses in the town has helped improve its economic resilience. While there is now a thriving jobs market in the town, low paid and insecure work has characterised many of the opportunities which have come to Corby since the closure of the steelworks, and the growth sectors of the local economy are vulnerable to automation. Poor quality work presents challenges for many residents, and lowers young people's aspirations and confidence. Opportunities for good work and further education are also vital to keeping young people in Corby. Indeed, the out-migration of younger generations has been a key challenge for the other industrial towns in our study.

Looking to the future, political changes spell uncertainty. At the time of writing, plans to subsume Corby Borough Council into a unitary authority are awaiting a decision from the Secretary of State. These plans put at risk the institutional knowledge which the council has accumulated over the years and its close relationship with local organisations and residents. They are also likely to temper the voice and influence of Corby's residents, whose representatives will be incorporated into a larger entity together with neighbouring towns - places which have traditionally been socially and politically distinct.

Once again Corby will have to adapt to meet both the new needs and aspirations of its growing population and changes to the economic and political landscape. Corby has risen to the challenge before but meeting these new challenges will demand different approaches and ways of doing things, and new coalitions of residents and stakeholders. Through our next workshops, focusing on innovation to meet social needs, we will explore some of the ideas which could help shape Corby's future.

The image shows the exterior of the Corby East Midlands International Pool. The building features a prominent, large, arched entrance with a corrugated metal roof. The facade is composed of dark, vertical panels. In the foreground, a paved plaza with a grid pattern is visible. Several people are present: a man in a blue tracksuit is walking towards the camera, a person in an orange high-visibility uniform is working near a trash bin, and two people in yellow shirts are standing near the building's entrance. The background is filled with lush green trees under a clear sky.

Social Sustainability in Corby: complete findings

Social sustainability in Corby: complete findings

In this section we set out more detailed findings for each of the four dimensions of social sustainability. The findings draw on data gathered through the interviews, workshop and secondary data. The sub-headings in each section set out the different elements taken into account within each social sustainability dimension.

1. Amenities and social infrastructure captures the services, activities, and spaces that are needed to support individual and community life. It includes key services such as health, education, and transport, as well as spaces and events which allow residents to meet, and examines the extent to which the needs of different groups are catered to.

1.1 Quality of local education

- A small number of schools in Corby are performing very well and some residents feel there have been significant improvements in local education.
- However, there is concern around growing educational inequality in the town. The majority of schools report educational outcomes below the England average at both primary and secondary level. According to recent data, 49.3% of pupils achieve five GCSEs at grades A* to C, compared to an England average of 57.8%.² There are also concerns that some schools are not supporting young people in their transition to work.
- According to stakeholders, special needs are not well catered for in the local education system and a significant number of families home-school their children.
- Higher education is available locally through Tresham College, however those wishing to pursue a university degree must go further afield.
- Workshop participants commented on poor adult learning facilities in the town.

1.2 Local healthcare provision

- Many residents express a concern that healthcare infrastructure is not keeping up with population growth, while the pressure on services has been exacerbated by falling health budgets.
- There are services and infrastructure which offer opportunities to be active locally, with amenities such as the swimming pool and walking paths.
- However, mental health services in the town are considered stretched and insufficient for the high levels of demand.
- The Urgent Care Centre is highly valued by many residents and a campaign to keep it operating under its current model gained widespread support.
- The town lacks a hospital and increasingly centralised health services can pose particular difficulties for those without access to a car.

1.3 Local transport

- Public transport is felt to be insufficient to meet the needs of residents and Corby's growing footprint - some newer neighbourhoods, and those further from the centre, are considered poorly served.
- Poor transport is considered a particular issue for elderly residents and people with mobility problems, and some workers face slow journeys to work on the edges of the town. This can be a particular problem for people working on shifts that start and end in the night or early morning.
- 27% of households in Corby do not own a car and many are reliant on taxis to get around.³ While taxis are relatively good value, it can be difficult or expensive to travel to some neighbouring towns.
- The re-opening of Corby's train station in 2009 has improved connectivity to London and other towns on the line. However transport to other towns and cities in the region is considered to be weak.

1.4 Spaces, services and events

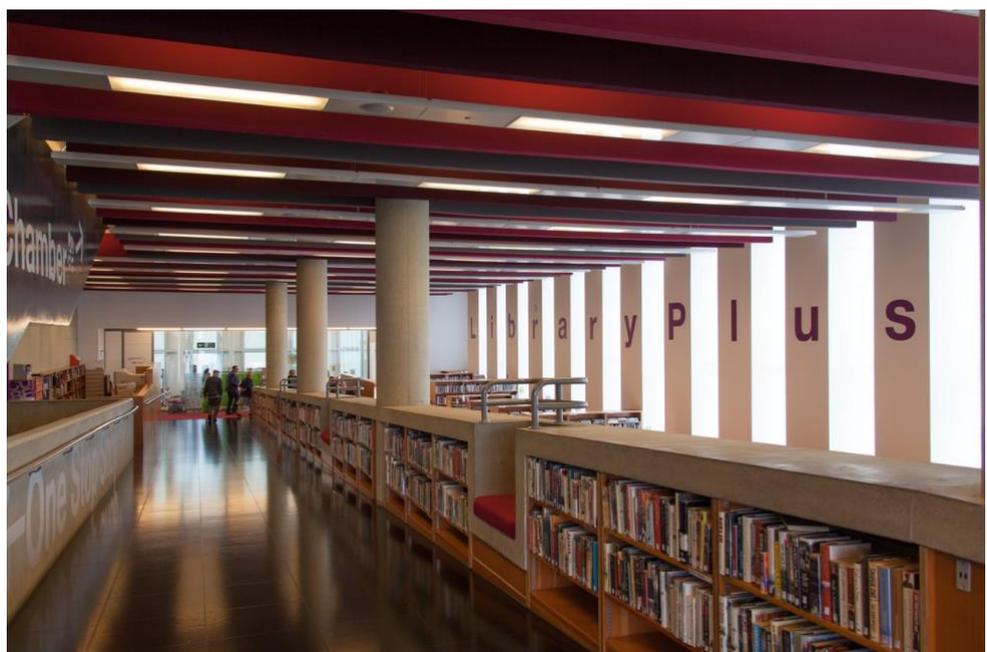
- Improvements to the town centre are well regarded by many residents who express pride in the Corby's new facilities. New amenities such as the cinema, theatre and restaurants provide spaces for residents to socialise and come together.
- The Cube, the town's new Civic Centre and library, is considered an inclusive space. However, there are felt to be few other spaces which are accessed by a wide range of residents.
- There are a reasonable number of community venues for different groups, although many are dispersed outside the town centre. Each neighbourhood has its own community centre. Some of these spaces are well used, while others are considered "moribund" and lack attractors to bring people in.
- There are a range of well-attended community events in Corby, with annual events such as the Highland Gathering and Burns Night key markers in the town's calendar.
- Corby also benefits from an increasingly thriving cultural sector, driven in part by new organisations such as Made in Corby and Rooftop Arts.
- Churches and other religious spaces are an important asset for sections of Corby's residents and at the centre of community life for some migrant groups.

1.5 Provision for different groups

- Families with young children benefit from the Pen Green Centre, one of the country's leading early years providers. However, it was reported that childcare can be expensive and hard to find.
- The town has a growing number of amenities for families, including the Corby Climbing Centre and the East Midlands International Swimming Pool.
- Youth facilities in the centre of the town have closed and there is little variety in youth provision.
- Many feel there is little for young adults in Corby, which has a small night time economy compared to nearby towns.
- There is some social provision for people from different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. This includes supplementary schools for the Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Serbian communities and a Polish film club hosted at Corby's cinema.
- A lack of ESOL services is felt to contribute to isolation and a lack of integration among migrant communities.

1.6 Quality of public spaces

- Corby has a high proportion of green spaces and the town’s parks and woodlands are a key local asset. The openness of the townscape is valued by some residents.
- Corby’s new developments are felt to have been designed with well-considered public spaces.
- Regeneration efforts in the town centre have improved its image among many residents.



Clockwise: Corby town centre; Corby Steelworker Statue, Corby library inside the Cube. Source: Academy of Urbanism, David Kennedy 2017.

2. Social & cultural life captures the less tangible elements of local life, from feelings of safety and local identity, to neighbourliness, social supports and relationships between different groups - elements which are often closely interwoven.

2.1 How people feel about Corby

- Many commented on their pride in the town. This was often linked to the town centre renewal and Corby's revived economic fortunes. Some also connected this to increasing numbers of people visiting and moving to the town.
- The people of Corby, their strong community spirit, generosity, friendliness and welcome were considered to be markers of the town, differentiating it from surrounding places.
- However, many cited enduring negative perceptions of the town, particularly among residents of neighbouring towns. It was often felt these were unfair or partial. For some this poor reputation is a central issue.

2.2 Sense of local identity & place

- Narratives of Corby's identity are strongly rooted in the town's migrant history, its Celtic connections and its reputation as 'Little Scotland'. This heritage is considered to live on in the distinctive local accent, annual events such as the Highland Gathering and Burn's Night, and local associations such as the Grampian Club.
- The town's identity is also linked to Corby's steel heritage and wider associations of the town as a place of manufacture and production.
- A history of heavy industry is also sometimes linked to a social legacy of heavy drinking and a reputation for "roughness".
- Some report that a more inclusive identity is needed which encompasses the town's diverse population and its new economic landscape, there have been a series of events and activities aimed at doing this.
- The town's centre retains some of its mid-century features, the legacy of its 'New Town' status. While preserved in some parts, others have been demolished to make way for new development.

2.3 Relationships between residents

- There are felt to be high levels of neighbourliness and strong social supports in the town among many longstanding residents, this is often linked to the town's Scottish heritage and its "clannish" family networks.
- There are reports that good social networks have already become established among residents of recent housing developments. However, there is also a perception that there is often a lack of integration between different groups of residents in newer areas.
- Corby has a relatively large and growing footprint and is made up of distinct neighbourhoods. Residents from different parts of the town can feel disconnected, this was related both to geographic and socio-economic divisions.
- There has been a significant growth in the population of foreign-born residents in the town since 2004, in line with the experience of many parts of the UK. There is considered to be significant unease around foreign migration and newcomers face difficulties integrating into the town. Some migrants report discriminatory experiences. For many this is a key issue.

2.4 Local quality of life and wellbeing

- Quality of life in Corby is associated with the benefits of living in a smaller town, including greater access to green spaces, the accessibility of the town centre and services, and lower housing costs than many other parts of the country.
- However, many residents face challenges associated with poverty and deprivation, a third of Corby's population live in areas categorised among the 20% most deprived in the country.
- Deprivation is particularly accentuated in the health and education domains of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.⁴
- Food bank usage has risen and some residents are experiencing increased poverty associated with benefits changes and the rising cost of living.
- Migrant groups in Corby are likely to be on lower wages, with EU migrant earnings on average £3.70 per hour less than their UK born counterparts in North Northamptonshire. Non-EU migrants are estimated to earn on average £1.20 less.⁵
- Some foreign born residents are also encountering poor living conditions in 'Houses of Multiple Occupancy' (HMOs) which have been widely reported.
- Corby performs below the England average on a range of key health indicators, including life expectancy. There is a high incidence of lifestyle associated risk factors, in particular related to alcohol consumption and low levels of physical activity.⁶
- Mental health problems are also considered a key local issue, with self-harm levels above the national average.⁷
- In spite of these social challenges, official data highlights increasing levels of 'life satisfaction' in the town, in 2017/18 Corby scored above the UK and Northamptonshire averages.⁸
- The strength of local social relationships is felt to contribute significantly to wellbeing locally. Yet social isolation is still considered a key issue which can particularly affect older residents and migrant groups.

2.5 Feelings of safety

- There are mixed perceptions on safety in Corby. While some residents report significant improvements, particularly in areas which were once known crime hotspots, some report that police cuts have diminished feelings of safety in the town.
- According to police data, Corby has crime rates above England averages, however these are in line with crime rates for similar areas.⁹

3. Voice & influence explores the extent to which people feel they have any control over the places they live. Control can be felt or enacted at many different levels, from residents knowing where to go to complain or feeling confidence in agencies to act in their interests, to active participation in local forums and co-designing local strategies.

3.1 Trust & confidence in agencies

- Corby Borough Council is well regarded by many residents of the town. It was noted that local politicians and council officers are considered visible and responsive.
- However, some distrust has been created in relation to the council’s growth policies and there is a perception that infrastructure is not keeping up with development. Distrust was also associated with the overspend on the Cube.
- Workshop participants commented that the council is less approachable than before, this was thought to be related to lower budgets and capacity.
- Overall, it was noted that agencies’ decreased capacity, as a result of austerity, has undermined confidence among residents.
- Corby face a loss of political clout under the unitary council plans currently under consideration. These will subsume the Borough Council into a larger entity including politically distinct surrounding areas. Local opposition to the plans mean there is already significant distrust around the proposed structure.

3.2 Local activism & voice

- There are many vocal residents in the town and consultation exercises often receive a high number of responses and participation.
- There have been well-supported issue-based campaigns in the town, such as the ongoing campaign to preserve Corby’s Urgent Care Centre.
- There are high levels of engagement and participation in online forums relating to Corby, with popular Facebook groups such as Corby Chats Back. There are also active forums for each of the different neighbourhoods and estates in the town. However, it is felt that these informal channels have little influence.
- Union membership has declined significantly since the closure of the steelworks, with a more fragmented employment landscape leading to fewer unionised jobs. It was noted that while they still play an important role for their members, unions no longer have a role “at a town level”.
- There is a perception that residents have been less involved in shaping the town’s strategies in recent years than previously. The comparison was drawn between the development of town strategies under the auspices of Catalyst Corby in the early 2000s, when large scale consultation exercises were conducted. The decline in engagement was linked to cuts in council budgets.

3.3 Willingness to act to tackle problems

- A history of worker and local authority mobilisation around the steelworks closure is felt to endure in the proactiveness of the town and its agencies today.
- There is a core of active residents and stakeholders who are highly engaged in a range of initiatives to improve the town. However, there is a sense that the group is small

and that the majority of residents are unwilling or unable to actively participate. This was linked to time pressures and a lack of knowledge as to how the system works.

- Several people commented on cynicism or pessimism among a share of the population, this was linked to a history of “stop-start” initiatives in the town.
- It is felt that there is significant apathy among young people and a lack of knowledge around how decision-making works at a local level. It was noted that young people’s voices are often not included in shaping youth services.
- A number of residents commented on the strong volunteering culture in Corby and a willingness among many to lend a hand. Data from 2008 indicates that volunteering was slightly below the England average.¹⁰ However, it is likely to be in line or above average for comparable areas.¹¹

3.4 Existence of groups & associations

- Many report that the town has a large network of groups and associations. In 2009, Corby had 1.6 charities per 1,000 population, below the England average of 2.6 per 1,000 population.¹² This is typical of similar towns.
- Tenants and Residents Associations are still active in the town’s estates and neighbourhoods and are considered to be important local forums within some areas. However, there are concerns that they are not representative of the wider population and often do not succeed in attracting new faces.
- One stakeholder noted that groups and associations representing minorities in the town are under-resourced and lack the support of the council.

4. Adaptability & resilience describes the capacity of individuals and areas to adapt and thrive in changing circumstances. It takes into account the resilience of current economic and social structures, as well as the skills, qualities and services that allow people and places to respond to evolving needs and bounce back in the face of adversity.

4.1 Traditions of innovation and openness to change

- The town has shown itself to be proactive and open to change at an institutional level - Corby's recent history is one of significant adaptation and reinvention.
- Since the closure of the steelworks the town has returned to growth through the active pursuit of a range of regeneration strategies to bring in new residents and businesses, and reanimate the town.
- This experience of implementing regeneration strategies and initiatives has created capacity and knowledge around developing local policies and attracting development funds into Corby.
- The town is home to a number of innovative businesses, social enterprises and third sector initiatives. From Adrenaline Alley to Electric Corby, there is a willingness to test new things locally.
- Growth strategies received significant support from local residents at the time they were drafted. While there are some mixed views now as to the benefits of growth, there is more comfort with housing growth in Corby than in many towns of comparable size.

4.2 Local practices of collaboration & dialogue

- The council and key agencies across sectors worked closely together in response to the closure of the steelworks and this shared sense of endeavour continues.
- There is a notable willingness to participate and engage in dialogue among many of the town's stakeholders.
- We encountered mixed views on the extent to which the town's third sector collaborates. Some note the sector is increasingly fragmented and competitive as a result of funding cuts. Others feel umbrella initiatives in the town, such as Made in Corby, are helping to build connections and cooperation within the sector.
- It was noted that there are good connections between the council and voluntary services.
- Among local businesses there are considered to be varying degrees of commitment and engagement, some express a concern that few larger businesses are connected into the town's social fibre.
- It was noted by one stakeholder that there is a lack of connections between larger businesses and the town's small and medium sized enterprises.

4.3 Capacity to adapt to changing populations

- Corby's accelerated population growth has demonstrated the town's ability to effectively create new housing and provide an attractive place for new residents. Although some voice concerns about the strain on infrastructure there is general acceptance of new housebuilding.

- The town has been proactive in creating some new social and affordable housing. However, there are concerns that the majority of new housing developments are too expensive for many existing residents.
- There is perceived to be a lack of integration among new residents from overseas and a sense of hostility among sections of the population towards migrants. There were some reports of this manifesting in schools and in the warehousing industry.

4.4 Capacity to adapt to changing economic circumstances

- The town has succeeded in diversifying its employment base with a wide range of businesses meaning Corby is better able to weather redundancies or closures.
- According to the local authority, Corby's growth is increasingly driven by small and medium enterprises.
- Corby's location in the heart of the country and its access to good road transport links are strategic assets for its economic development. These have been harnessed by its growing warehousing, distribution and logistics sector.
- Traditions of manufacturing and related skills are another local asset and are attractive to new businesses. However, the low numbers of residents with advanced skills limits the attachment of some businesses to the town.
- It was noted that public spending cuts have diminished support for enterprise and social enterprise support agencies.
- Brexit poses a key risk to Corby's current model of development, foreign born residents have contributed significantly to the town's population growth and its labour force, making it vulnerable to an end to freedom of movement.
- Corby has also been successful in attracting EU funds to support regeneration efforts, these may not be available in the future.
- Many jobs in Corby's large warehousing and light manufacturing sectors are considered at risk from automation.
- The ongoing shift from high street shopping to online retail may jeopardise town centre regeneration which has focused on attracting major high street brands.

4.5 Capacity of an area to meet future needs and aspirations

- The development of the town's amenities are noted by many to have improved the experience of life in Corby, the town is increasingly considered a regional destination attracting people from neighbouring towns and further afield.
- However, concerns were expressed that strategies around housing growth and the development of the distribution sector are not sufficiently ambitious or imaginative.
- It was noted the town has failed to position itself to take advantage of the knowledge and creative economies.
- Many young people move away after school to seek better education and employment opportunities and do not return. There is a concern that many young people remaining in the town have low aspirations and optimism and see few local opportunities.
- The plan to subsume Corby Borough Council into a unitary authority with neighbouring East Northamptonshire towns is of concern to many stakeholders. It was noted that county-wide strategies have often not worked in the town, which is politically distinct from the surrounding areas.

4.6 Availability and quality of local work opportunities

- Significant opportunities for work have been created locally. Unemployment has been drastically reduced, from a rate of over 30% after the steelworks closure to 4.2% in 2016, slightly below the UK average.¹³
- Many work opportunities in the town are at lower occupational levels. Census data shows 21.7% of those in work in 2011 were in elementary occupations, compared to an England average of 11.1%.¹⁴
- Many opportunities in the town's new economic sectors, particularly warehousing and distribution, are characterised by insecure conditions and low pay. Zero hour contracts are still common among some employers and many expressed concerns about the dominance of agency work in the town. It was noted that the council has acted to curb the activities of the town's more nefarious employment agencies.
- Residents commented on the lack of pride and identity in many work opportunities available in the town today. This was contrasted against the strong workplace associations when the steel industry was dominant.

4.7 Extent of under-used space, adaptable spaces & facilities, and brownfield sites

- Corby has relatively low cost land, and a high availability of consented land and brownfield sites, this has already proven attractive to developers and enabled rapid housing growth.
- The town centre has many under-used assets and spaces, including the old library which now houses Rooftop Arts.
- The town is dispersed over a large area with a small centre, limiting the potential to cluster new initiatives.



From left: new housing in Corby; Corby Enterprise Centre. Source: Academy of Urbanism, David Kennedy 2017.

Endnotes

¹ *Design for Social Sustainability: a practical framework for building communities*. Social Life, 2012.

² Department for Education, 2015/16

³ Census 2011

⁴ Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2015

⁵ *Local Migration Panel: Corby*. IPPR, 2018.

⁶ Public Health England

⁷ Public Health England, Hospital stays for self-harm, 2016/17

⁸ ONS, Personal well-being in the UK: July 2017 to June 2018

⁹ Police UK, 2018

¹⁰ Place Survey, 2008

¹¹ NCVO, *UK Civil Society Almanac*, 2018

¹² NCVO, 2009

¹³ *Local Migration Panel: Corby*. IPPR, 2018.

¹⁴ Census 2011

Social Life

Social Life is an independent research organisation that aims to put people at the heart of places. We work with local authorities, developers and local community groups in the UK and across the globe to find practical ways to build stronger communities.

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