

Which characteristics are the most significant in influencing the place identity of Whitley Bay, Newcastle-upon-Tyne?

Introduction

Whitley Bay is a ward located in the east of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, in northern England. I have chosen this location as I lived here from birth until 15 years old so I have a strong emotional connection to it. The ward is located on the coastline of the North Sea and has a population of 9,400. It is a popular location for beach-goers in the summer months with sandy beaches all along the coastline. A map of the ward can be viewed in Figure 1.



Figure 1: A map showing the ward of Whitley Bay in Newcastle upon Tyne.



Figure 2: Annotated photograph of the seafront at Whitley Bay. Photograph from Wikipedia.com.

Built environment

Whitley Bay is dominated by a grid-like layout of streets with Victorian terraced houses. Although there are some newer housing estates such as in the west of the ward, where streets are more curving and homes have driveways and garages, the vast majority of homes were built in the early 20th century. These have very small front gardens with no space for driveways or garages. These can be seen in Figure 3.

There are no major roads that pass through Whitley Bay, the most important ones would be Earsdon Road which travels north to south in the west of the ward, and the A193 which is the seafront road. Public transport is mainly made up of the Tyne and Wear Metro line which connects Whitley Bay with central Newcastle and other areas in the region such as Newcastle Airport. There are two Metro stations in the ward: Whitley Bay and Monkseaton.



Figure 3: An annotated photo of Bideford Gardens. Photo from Google StreetView.

Most of the building of Whitley Bay occurred between World Wars 1 and 2. Figure 4 shows a historic map from 1865 of the area which shows it was largely rural at the time. This means that the built environment is a significant part of the local area with it only being built in the last century. The major feature of Victorian terraces that dominate the landscape are important to shaping the location.



Figure 4: An historic map from 1865 of Whitley Bay. From the National Library of Scotland.

Demographics

According to data from the 2021 Census, 93.1% of people living in Whitley Bay were born in the UK (compared to an England average of 82.6%) which suggests that Whitley Bay is a very 'British' area with little immigration – only 3.3% of people in the ward have a non-UK passport. In addition, 94.6% of people are white, compared to an England average of 81%; so the ward is very 'White British', meaning that there may be little diversity and few international services in the area.

As can be seen in Figure 5, the age profile of Whitley Bay suggests that there are below average young adults (20 to 34 years old) but above average older adults (35-59 years old), with around average numbers of children. This suggests that maybe Whitley Bay is popular with families but that maybe housing is too expensive for young adults to afford – this would make sense since most of the houses are Victorian terraces rather than flats which young adults are more likely to purchase.

Bibliography

- Wikipedia page for Whitley Bay: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitley_Bay
- Census data for Whitley Bay: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/>
- Google StreetView from Google maps: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps>
- Historic map from NLS: <https://maps.nls.uk/view/102346464>
- Chronicle Live – Whitley Bay campaigners fight plans to remove promenade balustrades: <https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/whitley-bay-campaigners-fight-plans-9564415>
- Election history for North Tyneside: <https://members.parliament.uk/constituency/3652/election-history>

Age profile

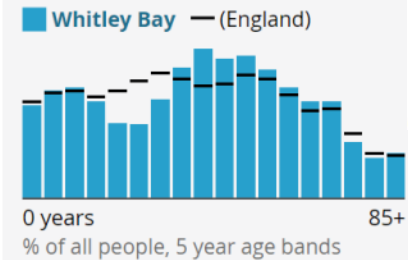


Figure 5: Age profile for Whitley Bay. From Census 2021 data.

The demographics are clearly very influential in the place identity of Whitley Bay, as it means that there are lots of families which may result in certain services needing to be provided like schools, health centres, and parks for recreation.

Political

The three councillors for the Whitley Bay ward are all from the Labour party and represent the ward on North Tyneside Borough Council, whilst the local MP for Tynemouth is Alan Campbell who is also from the Labour party. Looking at the election history for this area, it has consistently voted for the Labour party since 2010 when the election boundaries were changed. This is quite normal for the Newcastle area which is a traditional Labour stronghold due to the industrial past of the area when shipbuilding and coal mining were major industries, and as such had strong union representation which are strongly linked with the Labour party.

The community group "Whitley Bay Coastal Action" (WBCA) campaigns for clean beaches along the seafront and has members who regularly carry out beach clean-up activities as well as distributing information leaflets to members of the public during weekends and Bank Holidays in the summer months to encourage them to take their litter home with them. Another group, the Save Our Balustrades (SOB) movement is a protest group campaigning to prevent the local council from demolishing part of the promenade along the seafront. The council also wish to replace concrete balustrades (which are types bollards – see Figure 6) with metal ones, which are strongly opposed by SOB.

Conclusion

From my research, it is difficult to say exactly which of the three categories is most important in defining the place identity of Whitley Bay. The built environment provides significant features such as Victorian terraces, grid-like streets, and key infrastructure such as the Metro line. The demographics show that most of the population are families with older adults and children, meaning that certain services must be provided. The demographics link to Whitley Bay's industrial past and so they tend to always vote for the Labour party. There are some important community groups who are passionate about protecting and maintaining the seafront, whether the historic structures or the beach environment.

I think that taking everything into account, the built environment is the most influential category because the types of homes has influenced the demographics of the area (families need homes with multiple bedrooms) and those Victorian terraces are clearly linked to the politics of the area in that it used to be industrial.



Figure 6: A photo of the balustrades at Whitley Bay seafront. Image from Chronicle Live.

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