

Happisburgh Coastal Village Workshop

13 September 2007



Feedback Report

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Coastal Management Team**

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Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

This report provides an outline of the workshop held at the Wenn Evans Centre on 13th September 2007 and summarises the contributions of participants. (Some of the actual feedback gathered is attached as an appendix). We are grateful to all those who attended. The report has been posted on the Council's website www.northnorfolk.org/ldf under the 'latest news' heading and has been sent to all those who attended or requested feedback from the workshop.

Outline of the workshop

The overall aim of the event was to provide an opportunity for key members of the local community to highlight the specific issues that they feel should be addressed in planning the future of Happisburgh. This included discussion of matters relating to 'coastal change' (resulting from the Shoreline Management Plan and its consequences for the village), together with the identification places where new development should be considered to meet the settlement's needs. The outputs from the workshop will be used to inform the Coastal Management Plan and the Site Specific Proposals Document (part of the Local Development Framework).

The Workshop was chaired by Cllr Lee Walker and participants included Members of the Parish Council, members of the Coastal Concern Action Group, representatives from local businesses, clubs and other organisations. Altogether there were twenty-seven people present.



The event included presentations on planning policy and coastal management, followed by sessions in which participants highlighted the important issues for the village and identified the possible development options for its future. Question and answer sessions were followed by general discussion and feedback was gathered from participants about the event.

What participants said

Summary

Whilst Happisburgh has been at the front line of the effects of coastal erosion for some time, experiencing devastating harm to the local environment and infrastructure, the response has been one of resilience from a community intent on campaigning for social justice. There is obvious concern in the village about the continued threat of erosion and the blight that this will cause, but local people continue to hope for on-going maintenance of sea defences and for the vibrancy of the village to be sustained through investment and support for its economy and infrastructure.

Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

Detailed issues were raised, relating to the state of the physical environment (particularly the foreshore and cliff top) and the quality and level of public facilities (such as play equipment and toilets). There was a hope that new development will address local needs but also be sensitive to the local environment. A summary of what participants were proud of, sorry about, what they hoped and what they feared is given below.

Proud

There was great pride expressed about the facilities that serve the local people of Happisburgh and about its environment and heritage, but most notable was the pride in the people of the village and their willingness to fight to protect these things.

Sorry

Many participants expressed sorrow at the state that the coastal frontage has got into – the dereliction and degradation of the cliff-top, the poor state of the beach and the limited public accessibility of these. People were sad that this had been allowed to happen and that the Government seemingly will not take notice of their plight.

The rapid pace of erosion has attracted media attention and this has led to much negative publicity and scaremongering, which may have exacerbated blight and caused disinvestment. This in turn might have lowered the aspirations of local people and businesses.

Hope

It was hoped that the possible spiral of decline will be arrested by improvements to the local environment (particularly along the cliff-top and beach), together with continued investment in local infrastructure and key community facilities (such as play equipment, public toilets). This, it was hoped, would bring confidence in a brighter future for the village and positive media attention. It was also hoped that investment in sea defences would continue.

Participants hoped that development of new affordable housing would attract young people and foster a balanced community that will further support the facilities of the village. Good, environmentally aware, design was considered to be an essential characteristic of future development, if it is to make a positive contribution to the village.

Fear

There was fear that adequate sea defences will not be maintained, the consequences of erosion would not be properly managed and that blight would continue to be caused with no compensation or social justice. The fears were also expressed that the village would tumble into a spiral of decline as a result of the loss of some of the economic life of the village (principally through the holiday trade). This would impact upon the viability of village facilities.

Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

Aside from the physical and economic effects of erosion, there was real fear that the spirit of the community would sink into apathy and gloom and that confidence in the village, from residents and outsiders would be lost. New development, if not properly designed and planned, would cause further harm.

Key Issues

The village is obviously already suffering the physical consequences of cliff erosion, with derelict sea defences on the beach, dilapidation of cliff-top properties and loss of the slipway. It is also experiencing blight arising from the predicted erosion in the SMP, and the uncertainty about the future is inevitably affecting investment decisions as well as community wellbeing.

There is a mixture of disbelief about the extent of the loss that the SMP predicts coupled with hard-nosed realism, born from the experiences of recent years, in which the dramatic results of the failure of sea defences is all too real. This has manifested in a robust response from the community to fight for 'social justice' and for the erosion and its consequences to be 'managed'. There is a desire to see the harm already caused rectified through improvements to the physical environment and for the future threat to be allayed by compensatory measures and actions to assist the community in adapting in advance of further physical loss. Thus further action is demanded to slow the pace of erosion (buying time), in order to enable the areas immediately under threat to prepare, coupled with measures to safeguard the key attributes of the village so that the community as a whole can become more resilient to change.

There was a commonly held perception that the actions of external agencies were standing in the way of progress on addressing the issues and that there was a lack of integration in relation to coastal management decisions. The apparent constraint imposed by the designation of part of the cliffs as a 'geological Site of Special Scientific Interest' was cited as symptomatic of the inflexible approach that was preventing a coordinated response to the erosion threat and there was a strong feeling that Government was refusing to recognise the plight of the village.

It was felt that future planning decisions need to reinforce the role of the services in the village, to reinvigorate its economy and improve the environment and infrastructure. Holidaymakers and visitors are crucial to the economy and there is a need to continue to make the village attractive to them and improve their experience.

Affordable housing is needed for young families, who are also crucial to the future survival and sustainability of the village and its community infrastructure. It was felt that new development should not be at the expense of the environment and that careful attention should be paid to design and siting. Many people felt that wherever possible new development should be exploited to address existing issues, such as the dislocation of Whimpwell Green and Happisburgh Common from the core village facilities.

Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

Site-specific issues/ ideas comments and suggestions

The following summarises the site-specific issues identified by participants, i.e. places where issues arise or can be addressed; sites that have development potential; sites that are under threat; sites that should be protected etc. These suggestions were made having regard to the potential effects of coastal erosion on the village in the coming years. This is notwithstanding the short-term maintenance that is taking place to extend the life of the existing defences, and the reluctance of many participants to accept that their replacement may not be feasible in the longer-term.

Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

- There is a need to identify a means by which Whimpwell Green and Coronation Close can be linked with the facilities in the village (particularly the school) by footpaths. This will provide safer routes and unify the communities. The siting of new development might help to facilitate this.
- The Manor Farm Caravan Park should be re-located to another site in the vicinity – land just inland, to the west of the existing site was suggested, although concerns were expressed about the possible visual impact.
- There should be a new beach access to the south of Beach Road and possibly from the caravan park in the event that it is relocated.
- There was some support for new ‘in-fill’ development within the boundary as long as it respects important green spaces, but there was also support for the settlement boundary to be extended in order to accommodate new housing development. Sites suggested were:
 - Around the Lantern Lane/ Whimpwell Street Junction (perhaps relocating the allotments) and adjacent/ opposite Seacroft Farm
 - The small plot to the south of Lighthouse Close
 - Gold’s Field (adjacent to Gold’s Farm on the North Walsham Road)
 - Land adjacent to the School, although concerns were expressed about the sensitivity of this site.
- Sites at Coronation Close and at Littlewood Farm were suggested for small-scale housing development, as long as they can in some way be connected to the village (by pedestrian routes).
- It was suggested that a promenade could be developed along the coastal frontage to serve as a new sea defence and that the slipway should be replaced. Alternatives were suggested such as setting new defences further back so that the coastal frontage and the land behind can be planned with a degree of certainty. Others suggested the prospect of a marina with facilities for Jet Skiers and Divers.
- The land to the south of Beach Road was felt by some to be an important open landscape (and the setting to the lighthouse) that should be protected. Others felt this would be a good location for a touring caravan/ camping site that could be ‘rolled back’.

Questions and general discussion points

Q. The extent of the scheme to extend the rock defences was limited because of the need for the continual exposure of the cliffs at the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in front of the caravan site. How can this constraint be challenged?

Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

A. *The most effective means is through discussion with natural England.*

Q. *When was the SSSI designated?*

A. *It was 'notified' in 1985.*

Q. *Have the sites for future development already been agreed?*

A. *No, the decision that Happisburgh should be a 'Coastal Service Village' has only recently been made and has not yet been confirmed. This workshop is the first step in the identification of the issues and needs of the village and discussion of possible allocation options. There will be several stages of consultation before the final outcome is decided.*

Q. *What kind of housing are we planning – how many and what mix?*

A. *Allocations (new sites identified in an LDF document) will be sought for up to twenty-six dwellings in total. This could be a single site or a number of smaller sites but they are expected to comprise fifty percent affordable housing.*

Q. *What is meant by affordable housing and will this be targeted for local people?*

A. *Allocation sites will be to meet the housing needs of the District as a whole. Affordable housing generally is for those who are unable to access housing through the open market – this is most likely to be met by social rented housing or 'shared ownership' housing. The specific needs of the local area could be met by 'exceptions' sites in addition to allocations, these could potentially be developed beyond the settlement boundary.*

Conclusion

Happisburgh has been at the front line of coastal erosion and this has had a marked effect on the physical environment. The local community, however, has remained resilient and the facilities in the village have survived. There was a clear desire to plan for a more positive future and participants were happy to accept change in the form of new development in order to counteract the effects of the erosion threat. There was a strong feeling that planning decisions should reinforce the assets of the village and address the most pressing issues.

There is no clear way of preventing erosion but it was felt most strongly that there should be a free hand in trying to *manage* it and also that the consequences - both physical loss and blight - should be addressed.

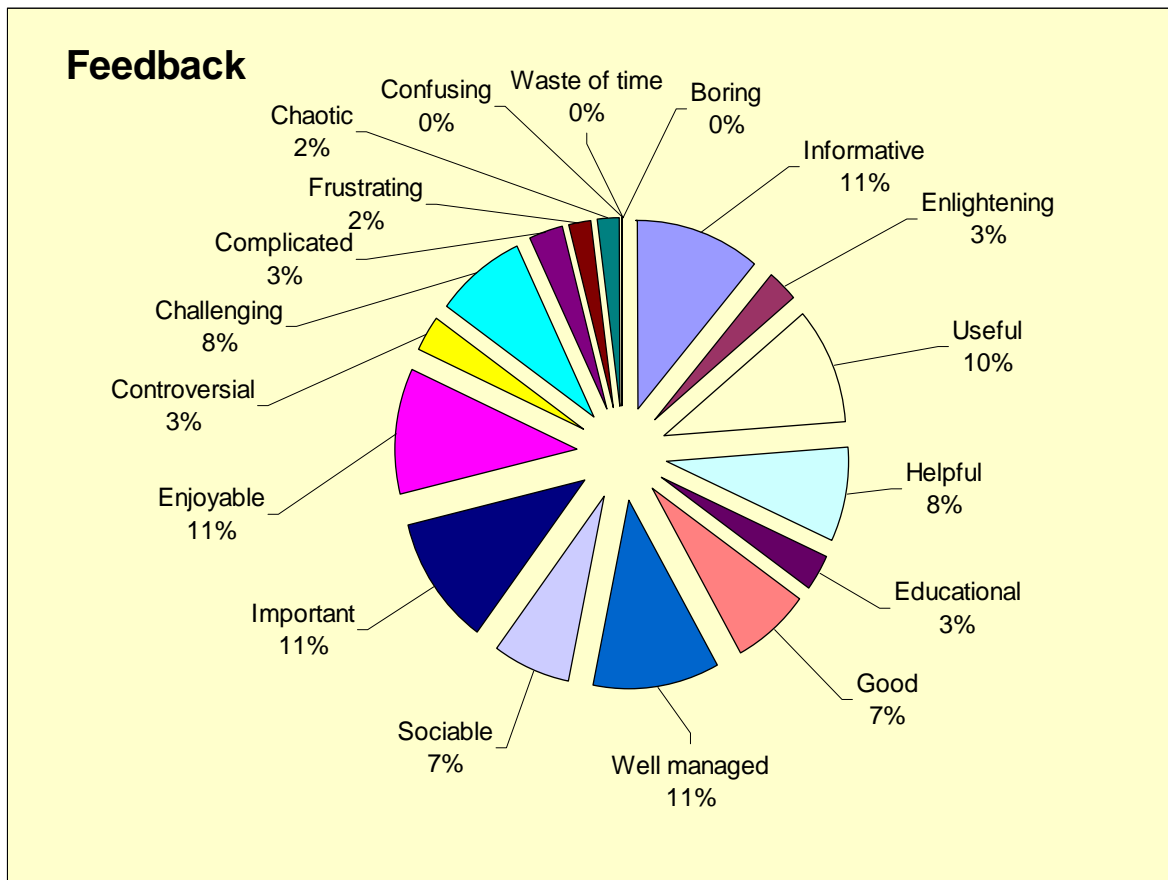
What participants thought about the workshop

Participants were asked to give feedback on their impressions of the workshop and to provide further comments on the matters covered.

There was full agreement that the purpose of the event had been made clear, that there was adequate opportunity to participate and that this was an appropriate means of involving people in the planning process. Ninety-two

Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

percent of participants felt that the workshop was the right length (the remaining eight percent felt it was too long).



Comments from the feedback forms

“I cannot emphasise too strongly the importance planners must attach to the need to preserve the quality of life, particularly visual amenity of the area for existing residents. Whatever is decided, I urge you to safeguard the free and open views from existing gardens.”

“Natural England does hold the cards. Until their attitude is altered who knows what we are doing.”

“If only the "powers that be" could see how strongly people feel about not letting go of Happisburgh and how community-minded we are, they might make a provision to protect Happisburgh in a different way from an impenetrable defence.”

What happens next?

The feedback generated at the workshop has been recorded, it will now be analysed and fed into the preparation of the Site Specific Proposals (SSP) document and the Coastal Management Plan (CMP) as appropriate.

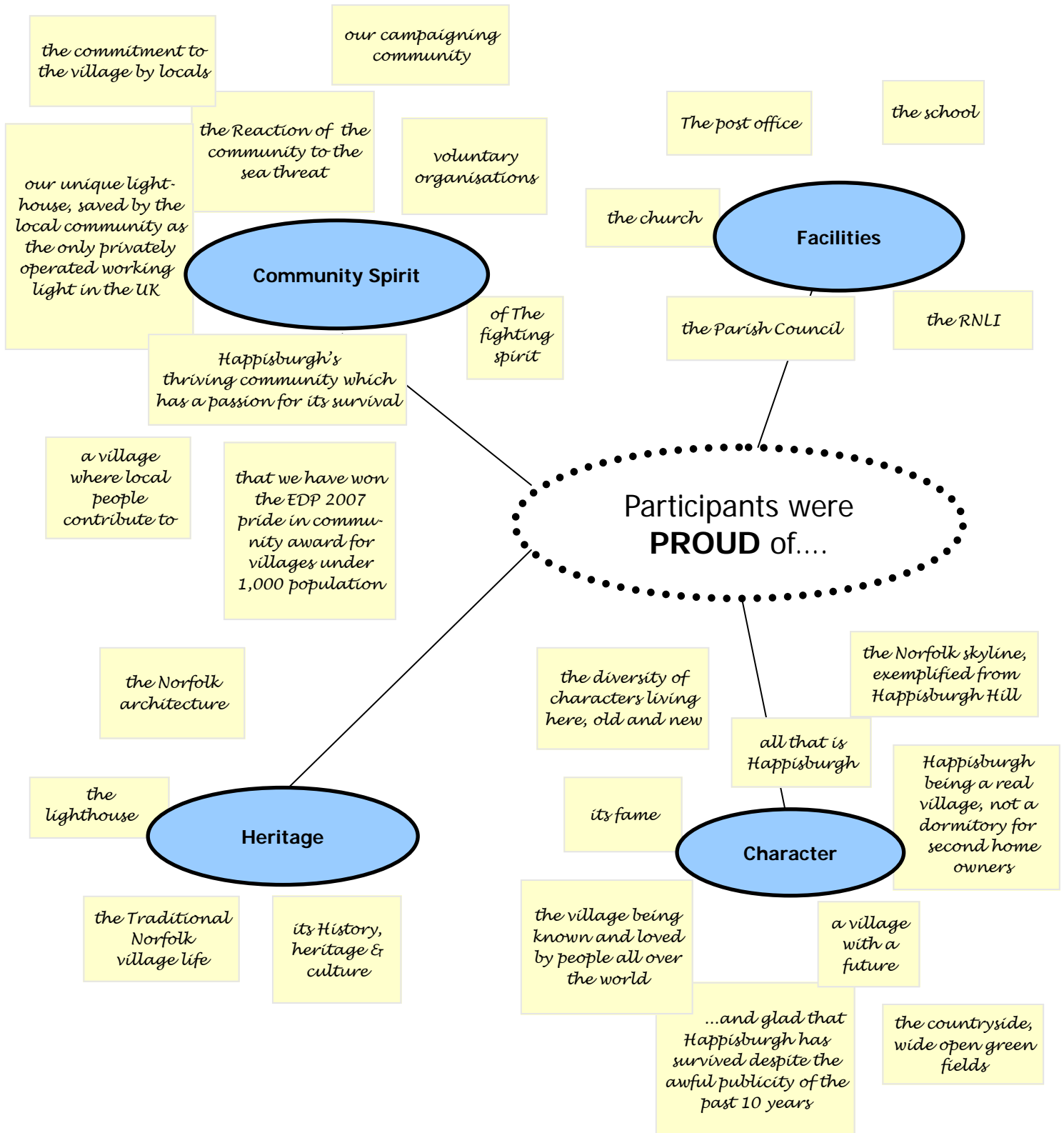
Happisburgh Village Workshop – Feedback Summary

Publication of the preferred SSP options will await the outcome of the examination into the LDF Core Strategy, which will set the context and determine, for example, the extent of the Coastal Erosion Risk Area and also confirm whether or not Happisburgh is to be identified as a location for further development. It is hoped that this will be decided by June 2008. The SSP document will then be submitted for examination in summer 2009.

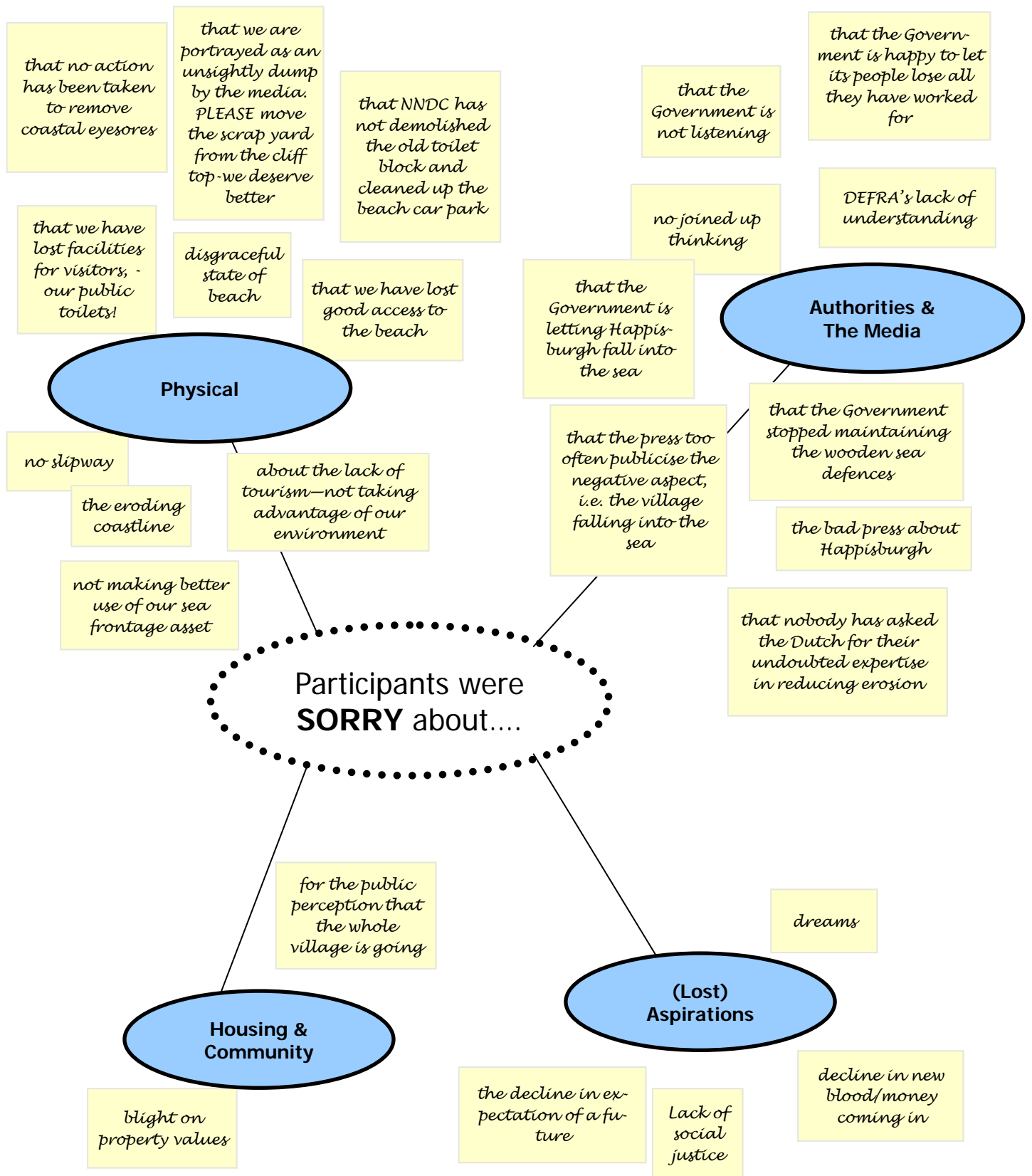
The Coastal Management Plan is not part of the LDF and will follow a separate process. This will involve developing issues, options and a vision for the whole North Norfolk coastline over the coming year. A detailed timetable for this will be published in due course.

Contact Rob Young (01263 516162) for further information.
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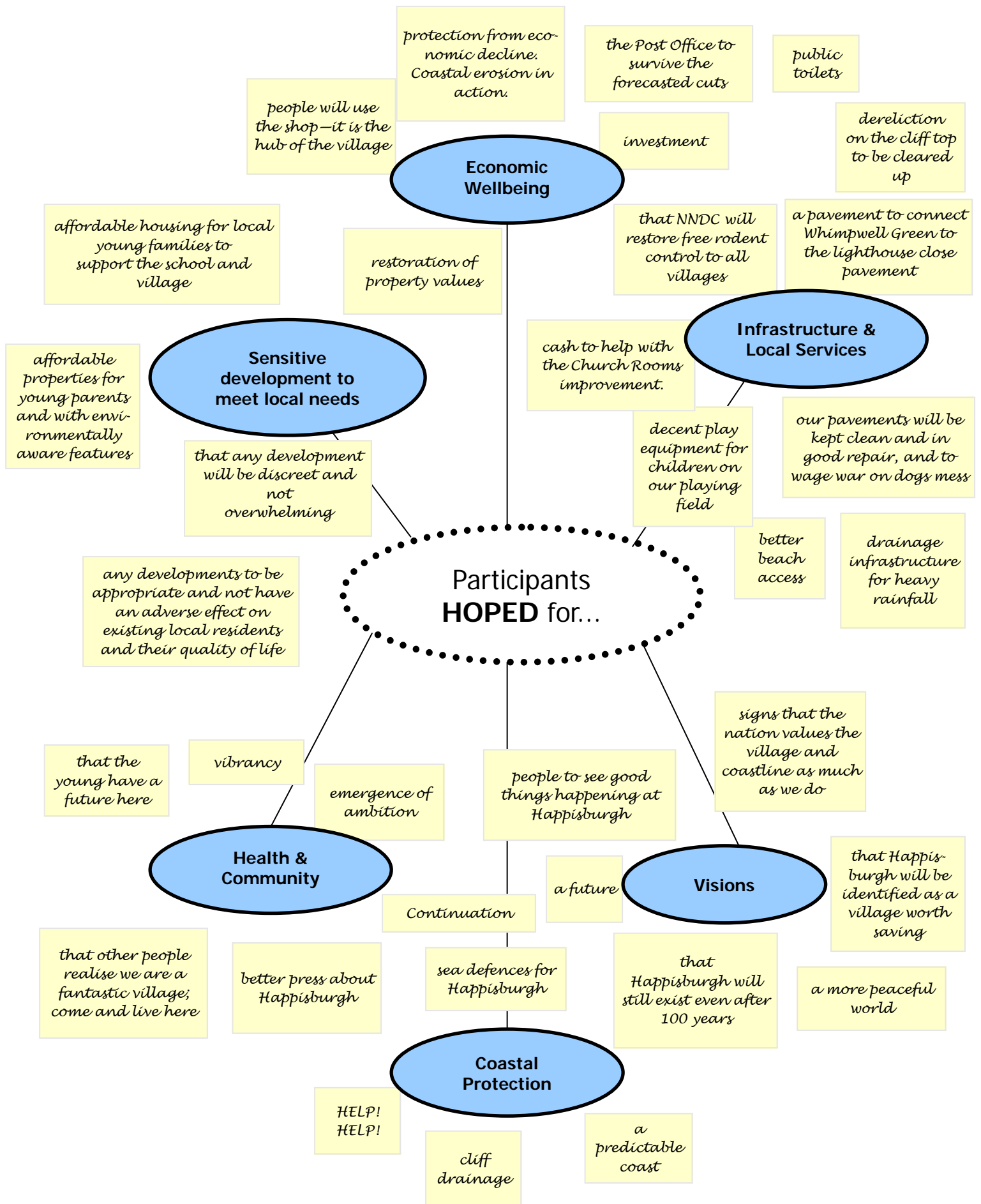
Happisburgh Village Workshop Feedback



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