

Summary of Discussions: Bacton and Overstrand Workshops



Workshops Report Annex 4

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report provides a summary of the ideas and comments received from local stakeholders as part of an evidence gathering study carried out for NNDC. Workshops were held at Bacton on the 20th February and Overstrand on the 21st February 2008. The aim of the evenings was to obtain information on roll-back, blight and other issues relevant to the coastal communities affected by the Shoreline Management Plan. Both workshops began with an introduction to the project and its aims. Subsequent questions and comments from the stakeholders affected the direction in which each workshop moved.

1.2 Information Gathered

This section presents a record of the information gathered at the two workshops. It is presented in bullet format as recorded at the workshops and will be used to inform the final report to NNDC.

2. BACTON, 20TH FEBRUARY 2008

Comments from general session following introductory presentation:

- all the problem for roll-back is economic: Government would need to underwrite properties;
- it goes beyond underwriting: there is a need to provide a guarantee of continued underwriting over time;
- the UK should take the same approach as they do on the continent and provide a guarantee for properties and activities, and for businesses and infrastructure;
- all the communities in the partnership [no note as to which partnership this refers to] are affected by what happens to us; and
- everything has been done in the wrong order. Blight was caused by the SMP but only now are the authorities looking at actions to mitigate it. If there had been talks before, we wouldn't have a string of unoccupied properties along the seafront.

Comments from roll-back session

“Businesses” group on roll-back and the reasons why it is not occurring:

- declining area – less tourism;
- difficulty of moving all infrastructure;
- coastal businesses – coastal tourism;
- future uncertainty;
- location near coast for some businesses;
- caravans can be moved but nowhere to go, close to the sea;
- land ownership;

- asset loss, no means of moving;
- no incentive to invest;
- limits planning ahead;
- business may move away from area;
- no confidence in decision-making;
- individual preferences, some wait till bitter end;
- cannot roll back hotel, have to change function;
- losing visitors, losing infrastructure;
- loss of infrastructure – access to beach;
- planning re-change of use;
- uncertainty over future policy(ies); and
- need infrastructure – road, POs, pubs, etc.

“Businesses” group on how roll-back may be helped to occur:

- reduce risk – change of use;
- planning policy to assist change of use;
- buffer to allow business planning;
- time linked planning for owners;
- how to invest in the community;
- change nature of business – hotel and flats;
- land banking by use;
- policy means to make land available;
- compulsory purchase;
- rate relief to allow for investment;
- clear policies; and
- joined up thinking and promotion of coast e.g. coastal route.

“Other stakeholders” group: initial comments:

- Defra’s position has all along been to say there is no precedent for compensation; now they are talking about an “adaptive toolkit”. They might be prepared to put money into this, and are considering whether to give individuals money to move; and
- Malcolm Kerby proposes a Coastal Realignment Fund, providing payments to cover a range of needs e.g. removal costs, new mortgages.

“Other stakeholders” group on roll-back and the reasons why it is not occurring:

- lack of recognition of this as a viable option. Roll-back is not a definitive solution: there will never be an end to adaptation;
- not clear who will ensure that property is available;
- lack of compensation and social justice – money, money, money;
- question of rights – people should be paid relative to what they paid for their properties. There can’t be a cut-off time for compensation since recent buyers have often not been told about the risks when researching property;
- timing – timing of compensation;
- communication – people don’t want to talk about roll-back because they think it will affect the value of their properties. There is a need for an open conversation

about managing the coastline. This is not what happened with the SMP where communities found themselves affected overnight by a change in Government policy;

- roll-back of infrastructure;
- problem of ensuring vibrancy – that new blood comes in;
- lack of clarity over nature of roll-back. Provision of “like for like” property? What value might be given to properties? Value of properties if bought out now? In another 50 years?
- ecological footprint of new build (NB some thought that all new properties should be designed to highest environmental standards – others didn’t want to be forced to move to a home of someone else’s design);
- equity release refused;
- absence of mechanisms to allow roll-back. Underwriting not in place. Planning mechanisms, e.g. to allow the use of farmland for replacing properties;
- insurance for properties;
- lack of options for roll-back of the *community*: roll-back threatens to alter the nature of the community. The “special character of coastal communities” needs to be maintained with roll-back; and
- roll-back through underwriting the rebuilding of abandoned properties would force residents to stay in the area: people who need to move elsewhere because of their work can find themselves trapped, as can elderly people who need to move away or sell up to cover the cost of care. Roll-back assumes that people want to remain, but communities have to change.

“Other stakeholders” group on how roll-back can be helped to occur:

- local authority should promote effective information;
- provision of infrastructure by local authorities;
- local authority should buy property, to give people the freedom to move inland;
- use the normal planning process, e.g. definition of areas for growth (but there was some concern that this might not be adequate if erosion moves quickly). Planning should consider social needs, e.g. of the elderly;
- planning and compensation; and
- there is a need for a flexible approach to roll-back recognising different needs.

“Other stakeholders” group: extra point:

- costs of lack of roll-back for other parts of the county.

Comments from blighting session

“Businesses” group on what has been noticed in the villages following the publication of the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP)?

- SMP changed policy;
- SMP extended problems;
- no blight in Mundesley;
- ramp – loss of this led to blight;
- uncertainty;

- no young people buying property;
- difference between business and commercial;
- SMP sudden and big change;
- 10-20 years time – readjustment of prices to take risk into account; and
- blight in perception? Not in Happisburgh – in Mundesley.

“Businesses” group on what are the negative effects which have occurred?

- property prices 25-30% overnight (after ramp lost, affects beach access);
- blight to Happisburgh;
- difficult to get insurance;
- affects all shops as people staying decrease;
- young people not willing to buy into village – retirement village;
- loss of community;
- valuation – no mention of blight, therefore perception of buyers;
- almost impossible to get mortgage in Happisburgh;
- cannot raise funds against building;
- banks re-negotiate funds;
- bad PR for village;
- Mundesley – only properties close to edge?
- disbelief in Mundesley that it will be lost;
- key change when through route is lost;
- buyer may benefit – lower price – disaster for seller; and
- Bacton – businesses selling up or closed.

“Businesses” group on how could these negative effects be managed?

- need to know what will happen in 50 years - to plan;
- provision for contingencies;
- potential for adjustment and acceptance – policy becomes ‘normal’;
- need to allow people access to facts;
- need to counter total loss of value of house;
- factual website;
- need mechanism to help current generation accept and adapt;
- provide services;
- provide infrastructure – roads facilities;
- will prices adjust over time?
- time for adjustment – need confidence;
- need funds to allow roll-back to occur;
- manage change effectively;
- blight not relevant to business decision – (but can affect price); and
- reduce uncertainty.

“Other stakeholders” group on what negative effects have occurred or been noticed following publication of the SMP?

- piecemeal process of change – not a “big bang” scenario;
- lack of confidence among local residents and potential residents;
- lack of confidence in housing and property;

- loss of interest in property;
- devaluation of property;
- unable to sell / houses difficult to sell – low value;
- no insurance / residents are made to feel they are not entitled to insurance (example given of an elderly lady who applied to Saga for insurance and was asked to measure the distance of her house from the sea);
- refusal of applications for equity release;
- life's savings are in homes;
- loss of businesses;
- feeling that future is lost; no choice or options;
- sense of injustice. The change in policy has taken away rights: the right to move, the right to a future;
- sense of moral responsibility for one's property: but you can't sell it, you can remain in it;
- blight "closes" communities;
- despondency;
- stress over future; fear / stress and depression of those living and working locally; waking in the night from worry;
- people want to stay in the community where their family history is, children have grown up; and
- (comparing the situation with that of mining communities): here it is more serious because for the miners it was just the jobs that were at stake, here it is everything.

“Other stakeholders” group on positive impacts noticed after publication of the SMP?

- communities feel more powerful because they have organised themselves.

“Other stakeholders” group on how could the negative effects be managed?

- information should immediately be provided to all potential buyers/investors (noted that NNDC is providing full information);
- compensation / underwriting would remove stress;
- underwriting communities at full market value – this is what is done in Holland and France (a strong argument was made that underwriting would have to cover the whole community and not just those whose properties were threatened). Having property underwritten would give security for future decisions;
- create a National Coastline Agency to manage a Coastal Realignment Fund; and
- as a last option, community could have recourse to the European Court of Justice, citing the European Bill of Human Rights – this would be more expensive for the public purse.

3. OVERSTRAND, 21ST FEBRUARY 2008

Comments from general session following introductory presentation:

- “we're probably going to struggle to be very positive: nobody here is going to roll-back because they want their coastline defended. People here don't accept abandonment”;

- SMP tried to predict what is going to happen in 100 years time – no one is going to buy it. The science is not certain – don't buy the idea of increased storminess, and there is a lot of debate about the rate at which sea level rise is occurring;
- what is the difference between this workshop and the September 2007 workshop which looked at where Overstrand might rollback to: John Ash pointed out that this workshop is looking at the issues and mechanisms around implementing change;
- the hill behind Overstrand acts as a major restriction on roll-back;
- “our suggestion is development so that it is the developer who pays for the defences”;
- where coastline has been defended – e.g. Cromer – this has not had a high cost and there has been virtually no erosion;
- what would be the costs of maintaining Overstrand without defences:
 - the prime activity for Overstrand is tourism: to maintain the economic activity without defences would involve building a new slipway every year;
 - there will be impacts on the sewerage system (which is under a car park that is at risk): a system will be needed for the houses not at risk;
 - value of tourism in Overstrand is £17.6m net annual value – need to consider what is required to make sure that this economic activity survives. Overstrand Parish Council produced a report with this economic evidence (Overstrand Community Economic report on SMP). Focus of the SMP is far too narrow. The East of England Development Agency has done some work on added value showing that all of the area is fast developing except for Norfolk – impact of loss of tourism would be very great;
 - defences could be financed without drawing on Government resources: Government could agree with an insurance company that they would be responsible for providing insurance for the area – they will find that building defences is the best way of avoiding paying insurance premiums;
- lack of trust in authorities and contractors – member of community asks are we wasting our time?
- we are a coastal community: we care about the coast; and
- division of the village between those at risk in 25, 50 and 100 years also causes a form of blight.

Comments from Different Groups

Group 1 on Managing Change – things that need to be considered over a 25-year timeframe¹. Things that need to be maintained to preserve community identity i.e. built into any adaptation option:

- local character: any roll-back would have to involve recreating the village as a “faux Overstrand”, including historic buildings, e.g. Lutyens Church, visual amenity of town, important for tourism and the “heart” of the village, which makes it comfortable to wander around;
- realistic [housing?] alternatives for people whose homes are at risk;
- unity of the community and avoidance of fragmentation;

¹ Group agreed that it was important to put the ideas into a specified timeframe, however as the discussion developed, it wasn't always clear that comments referred to this timeframe.

- beach access (fundamental for tourism) - access must be continuously maintained or replaced and the promenade can't be allowed to deteriorate as it could get dangerous and couldn't be used;
- continued investment in a thriving community;
- sewerage system: this needs to have work done on it now to avoid failure;
- children's playground (on top of the sewerage system); and
- services, especially for vulnerable people (shops, bus service, Church, cafes etc). Care homes (2) could be impacted by the loss of services.

Group 1 on Issues for Managing Change:

- uncertainty over rate of erosion of the coast;
- how social networks can be maintained;
- cost of feasible alternatives for replacing properties; and
- potential impact on Cromer of decline in Overstrand.

Group 2 on Roll-back Issues:

- feels like being a refugee;
- community – different – summer and winter;
- difficult to standardise – all people different;
- inland walks – close by beach;
- holiday homes – caravan site – hotel;
- Overstrand – low key tourism;
- locals – shop, PO, hotel ...transport;
- sustainable community – business – vibrant;
- provisional attachment;
- uncertainty – stress;
- loss of choice;
- access to beach vital – caravan parks provide mainstay; and
- change in property prices – loss of confidence.

Group 3 on the Assets of Overstrand and Their Value:

- have to maintain access to the sea and coast, this is what brings people in and helps to support the area (dependent on tourism). The key tourist infrastructure include the caravan site, pub and hotel – these encourage people to stay in Overstrand and spend their money there;
- access to the sea is also required for the fishing industry. Loss of access would kill the fishing industry in Overstrand;
- the heritage aspect is important – Poppyland;
- Overstrand is also part of the wider area, with landscape designations, geology and links to other towns/villages – 'Overstrand' benefits more than just the village;

- caravan parks are reliant on access to the beach. Car park, toilets and playground are also important assets;
- Overstrand is a service village with a Post Office, shop, school, café, churches; and
- golf course is important.

Group 3 on Potential Blight and Possible Ways Forward:

- social impacts;
- cost of maintaining the tourist assets is less than cost of not defending;
- cost of re-housing – no value in property, cannot afford to move. The costs of rehousing those affected will have to move to ratepayers;
- loss of confidence – people will move out as they cannot remortgage;
- blight could affect 150 properties and is driven by SMP lines on maps BUT pattern of erosion will not be a line, there is uncertainty over future losses (where/when), e.g. the main road;
- people moving in would be temporary or blinkered. They would only be looking for short term investment (5-10 years), such as for a holiday home. This would affect the sustainability of the village;
- there is no long-term view, no families. People that would move in would not support the village, not add to the village (e.g. buy to rent).
- house prices have decreased substantially for semi-detached properties (declined in real terms by 10-15% in three years), no obvious effect on terraced or detached properties;
- disparities in local wages;
- development – developers should pay for defences. The village needs to grow to reduce/remove problems;
- people are not able to get insurance now (or will not be able to in the future); and
- global warming may improve the weather (like Bordeaux) – could be benefits to coastal village like Overstrand in the future, therefore, loss of the tourist assets is short-sighted.

4. USING THE INFORMATION

The evidence gathered will feed into the final report produced for NNDC at the end of the study. The report will cover four tasks:

- Task 1: assessment of the effects of coastal change on infrastructure;
- Task 2: evaluation of the potential for implementing a roll-back policy (where roll-back could be viewed as ‘management of change’);
- Task 3: investigation into the effects of blight on communities; and
- Task 4: examination of measures to help those in properties at risk.

The workshops have helped to highlight the strong links between the different tasks, and raise additional issues which need to be considered, including:

- additional impacts that could be caused that have not been fully explored in the SMP and which can be covered partly under blight and partly under the baseline option when assessing the costs of providing roll-back and adaptation options compared with the costs of do-nothing²;
- assessing the potential opportunities for roll-back, including difficulties that will need to be overcome and the indicative costs of reducing or removing these constraints to ensure that the opportunities can be realised; and
- adding extra options to be considered under Task 4 (e.g. the inclusion of a Coastal Realignment Fund) as a way of supporting adaptation to coastal erosion.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION OR COMMENTS

We are grateful to all the participants for their time and the information they have provided us. Any additional comments on the matters raised at the workshops are welcome.

² The do-nothing baseline for the option assumes that this is not a no cost option, instead it will result in costs to NNDC (and consequently to Council Tax payers). The baseline for Task 4 will assess that the real costs of do-nothing are in order that the options for roll-back and adaptation are assessed fairly and appropriately.
