

Report on the Workshop for Caravan Site Owners and Operators



Annex 5

RPA

March 2008

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an account of the comments and ideas gathered from caravan park owners and operators at a meeting at Bacton Village Hall on the 13th March 2008. The aim of the afternoon was to gather opinions and ideas on how to ‘manage change’ in coastal caravan parks. The information received will be used to inform the final report of the evidence gathering study which is being carried out for NNDC.

2. COMMENTS FROM THE MEETING

The comments recorded are mainly arranged under the discussion points covered at the meeting, with an extra section giving general remarks on problems relating to coastal erosion. The information is presented in bullet format as it was recorded. Although the meeting split into two separate discussion groups, the comments are amalgamated in the account below under one set of headings.

Comments on the requirements for a successful coastal caravan site:

- no one way to run a site - individuality of each one is important;
- access to the beach is vital - this has already been lost from some caravan sites, for example Redhouse Chalet and Caravan Park, Bacton;
- village services e.g. shops, PO etc;
- infrastructure e.g. mains electricity, water, sewerage;
- road access to sites and surrounding area;
- views (especially sea views) are vitally important and will command a premium on price either for the pitch if owner occupier or for whole package if rented by holiday-maker. Can be 10% - 40%;
- cliff top position with ready access to beach (and not using car);
- car parked next to caravan (security);
- cater for wide variety of people. Was middle class from Midlands, then to working class, now turned full circle to middle class - often for a second holiday or bringing grandchildren. Some (professional classes) come to keep carbon footprint down;
- many looking for a beach holiday – bucket and spade and want a quiet site with no other facilities. (Different on North East Norfolk coast from say area to the North of Great Yarmouth.) Also inland sites provide facilities - clubhouses, fishing lakes, etc.);

- internet has brought wider usage;
- need a mix of owner occupiers? Some site all owner occupier, some mix with rented;
- caravan holidays now have less stigma;
- high spec static caravans - home from home with all facilities. Majority of caravans have water, sewage, electricity. Cost of caravans £15k - £150k;
- need a favourable planning policy. (One site could not move the line of caravans back from the eroded line due to planning restrictions);
- support from local authority (caravan holidays are a major source of tourist income);
- support from community - sites do keep shops and pubs etc. in business. The benefit of caravans is large. The communities benefit greatly from the income to the area;
- public transport close to site is an advantage; and
- the diverse area of NE Norfolk is an attraction.

Negative impacts felt since publication of the Shoreline Management Plan:

- scaremongering??
- has put some people off investing in a caravan therefore reduced business opportunity;
- lack of action resulting in rubbish and rubble on the beach from collapsing defences and buildings. Eyesore for villagers and visitors alike. Not a very good way to start the season;
- questions of how long, if and when asked as people are looking to buy a caravan or pitch;
- blight in some areas;
- value of the caravan park - would need to do something about the coast/cliffs if wanted to sell; and
- any negative impact on area in general, for example Overstrand, overflows to the caravan sites. They are part of the area thus share the associated problems (and benefits e.g. AONBs). If coastal villages decline, there are fewer reasons for people to visit, hence caravan sites lose business.

What would help your caravan site deal with coastal change?

• **Physical factors:**

- money to finance buying land. Relocation costs involved - buying land, setting up of electricity and water supply. Group 1 - figure of £20k per pitch for setting up a static caravan on land already in ownership. Group 2 - it does not take long to install infrastructure, cost of infrastructure £10-£15k per pitch;
- increased availability of land - example was given of a failed attempt to roll-back onto land owned by Norfolk County Council. Comment was made (Group 1) that the council have recently been overruled by government to the extent that they cannot refuse to release land;
- need to find viable land – close to beach with good access to beach;
- ensure the location remains attractive - worry that present defences look dreadful and are putting visitors off; and
- infrastructure (water, electricity, drainage).

• **Socio-economic factors:**

- nature of business i.e. influenced by weather means things are unpredictable anyway without having the uncertainty of erosion to deal with as well; and
- difficulty of investing in the future whilst simultaneously running a good business.

• **Political factors**

- planning laws to facilitate movement and allow change. Especially as have to deal with many limitations such as AONBs. (Group 1 did not seem to have objections to these in principle since recognition that such areas help bring people into the area.);
- help with planning (NNDC presumption against caravan sites). General rule is caravans 5m apart and 6m – 9m from cliff edge (varies depending on planning officer!);
- usually a need for amenity space but planning not consistent with this;
- more certainty about what was going to happen - unpredictability of the situation makes it difficult to decide what to do when;
- Government providing some funds;

- cost of land – market price or subsidised?
 - legislation - county council own land but reluctant to release it for roll-back. Cannot expect people to move if they do not facilitate the process; and
 - there was agreement (Group 2) that there needs to be a change to planning attitude to recognise the contribution caravans make to the economy of the area and the service they provide.
- **Timescale**
 - need to be able to plan. Parks need several years to establish. Want to be able to plant trees etc. so park blends in to the area. This needs several years. Visual impact can be an issue – screening;
 - can roll-back if given time. Planning is vital, cannot just move overnight. Better to have a number of smaller sites than one very large one (for visitors but also local community) Can take naturalness away from the area and loses present mixed use; and
 - time needed to convince owners that move is in their interest and that they will be moving – general agreement (Group 2) on about 5 years.

General comments on problems caused by erosion:

- Overstrand promenade is closed, and likely to remain so over Easter holiday period - impacting tourism;
- drainage issues - problems with boreholes. Sites finance their own drainage;
- sea defences - some parks, especially those owning land below the cliffs, are working on their own sea defences. (Impression was gained that trying to do something yourself was better than waiting for a decision one way or the other);
- caravan site owners/operators feel unable to obtain a proper response or help from anybody (comment from Group 1). Just passed round different people and associations. End up trying to sort things out themselves;
- roll-back - attempts have been made to self-finance. Trade off between running current business and planning/investment for future. If front row of caravans is lost, prices of the remainder have to rise to compensate. How long can this last?
- concern over plans to build coastal footpath exacerbated by loss of land to erosion. If parks are losing land to erosion and have to accommodate up to 10m of land used as a public right of way, they will lose a significant amount of space and hence income;

- erosion as a continuing process - even if people roll-back, in a generation or so they could end up on the coast again with the same problems;
- tourism - main industry - needs to be protected. Caravan sites are related to all the other services, local areas and wider Eastern region. One site of about 150 caravans gave a figure of 600 visitors per week during the summer;
- acknowledgment that erosion has always happened, but recognise that climate change is occurring (Group 1). Yet do not see this as a reason to stop defending - feel that erosion could still be combated;
- publicity - some regular longstanding visitors have been made aware of the SMP and current coastal erosion situation. General impression is that most visitors have no idea of the problems of coastal erosion and assume it is up to the local authority to take action e.g. by building defences and clearing up the beaches; and
- some customers have expressed concern at caravans located right on the cliff top.

3. USING THE INFORMATION

The evidence gathered will be used in the final report produced for NNDC at the completion 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 information obtained has increased our awareness of the additional impacts of coastal change affecting caravan sites which have not been picked up at previous meetings. For example, the uncertainty surrounding coastal change is forcing a difficult trade-off between investing in the future and simultaneously running a successful business. Time and planning are important in such situations, since caravan sites require planting and need to establish themselves so they blend in with the surrounding area. The workshop also highlighted how any roll-back policy would need to be comprehensive, involving not merely financial and land use planning, but consideration of other aspects of the move including timescale, marketing and integration with the rest of the community since caravan sites see themselves as both dependent and depending on their surrounding villages.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Thank you to all participants who have attended the meetings and provided us with information. Any further comments or ideas relating to the workshops are welcome.

