



Happisburgh

The village falling into the sea

Alan D Horn



Since 2010
30 houses lost
1 beach gained



Beach Road
30 houses remain
But for how long?



Bryony lives less than 100m from the cliff edge and is aware that her home has limited life and a maximum of 15 years, but much less if the severe storms of 2013 recur. She lives alone with her two cats and her vast collection of over 3000 books. She lost her last home, a bungalow, to the sea in 2013 when she awoke to find her cats staring through the floorboards of her kitchen at the remains of the rear of the property that had fallen 30m on to the beach as the cliff gave way. She says that she has only recently come to terms with the trauma that the experience caused but a recent cliff fall close to her current home is a real worry. Her property has little value due to its precarious position but it is her only asset apart from an old camper van that she says is where she will have to live if she has to leave. She is angry that just 5 miles up the coast, the village of Bacton has been protected by sandscaping the beach to protect the gas terminal and as an added benefit, the village itself. This has mainly been paid for by Shell although the North Norfolk District Council has contributed.

" If Bacton can be protected then why not Happisburgh?"



Unprotected cliffs and
a mile of neglected
defences



Remains of lifeboat
station jetty



Nichola lives next door to Bryony with her two children. Like Bryony, she is aware that her home is very vulnerable as the cliff edge gets nearer. She says that the house used to belong to her parents before they died and she has long, fond memories of living there. She was originally within the first phase of compensation (Phase A) but was downgraded to Phase B which was then withdrawn. Finding the situation nerve racking, she is under no illusion that she will lose the house without any compensation.

Having recently lost both her parents and her husband within a few years of each other the insurance received after their deaths was bittersweet as she has bought a small property close to the lighthouse and away from the "danger zone" which will provide income through rental until she has to move there. She confides that two sets of neighbours have divorced over recent years due to the stress of finding their only asset had collapsed in value and their ability to move dramatically restricted.

"I have to keep cheerful for the sake of my children, so I laugh a lot – otherwise I would cry"



North Norfolk Coastal
Path - too dangerous
to use



North Norfolk Coastal Path
Way Marker



Denise has been a parish councilor on Happisburgh for several years and lives with husband Stephen in the charming in Grade II listed "Thrums". When she and husband Stephen bought the C18 brick and flint cottage in 2010 the erosion was not a major issue. She felt that it was going at a slow, steady rate and that it was so far from the sea, the erosion would not affect it for 100 years. However, the storm of 2013 caused massive cliff falls and the erosion accelerated. The house is now just 200m from the cliff edge.

She feels that as sandscaping has been successful in Bacton there is no reason why it cannot be used to stem the rate of erosion in Happisburgh.

She is aware that Natural England may object to protecting the cliffs within the SSSI but is frustrated that no one seems to be leading any discussion on the subject.

"Because of the SSSI we cannot have hard defenses but surely we can have sandscaping?"



Revetments
unmaintained for over
40 years



WWII Pillbox
once 100m inland



10 years ago this
was a side road to
several homes



Malcolm was the main driver in highlighting the plight of Happisburgh to the authorities and in 2009 obtaining a portion of the Pathfinder fund totalling £3m that that allowed those at risk from losing their properties to move before their homes were swallowed by the sea. The funds were also used to create a new car park, toilet block, playground and a new access to the beach. The car park also continues to provide vital income to the community.

Malcolm is clear that there is no more support for communities like Happisburgh and that those at increasing risk have no hope of compensation. He is scathing of government and believes that whilst there are 16.9m people in the "UK coastal zone", the Government is trying to convince people that it doing more to help when in fact it is doing less.

"When we won the Pathfinder money, the Government Cost/Benefit calculation was 1:1 but it is now 8:1 (and probably nearer 10:1) which means that the residents of Happisburgh are now left high and dry without any hope of financial help"

"The coast is eroding faster than the Government can think yet coastal erosion accounts for only 9% of the flood and coastal protection budget"



Rock Armour
dissipating waves,
but ineffective
against storm
surges



A garden slipping into
the sea



And another



Clive is the landlord of the famous Grade II listed Hill House Inn, now under threat. The inn dates back to 1540 and has been a pub for over 350 years. He bought the pub in 1991 at full market value on the understanding that the coastline was protected and under the impression from the existing policy that the area was secure for over 300 years. The change in the Shoreline Management Policy in 2004 meant that everything he has is at risk and the current rate of erosion means that he won't have anything to pass on to his family who also work in the pub.

Until two years ago, the field below the pub was a thriving holiday caravan park but more than 50m of cliff has disappeared in recent years and the site relocated further inland. Hill House is now at risk.

Clive is the chairman of North Norfolk District Council and is fully aware of the limited help that is available from central Government. He believes that extending rock armour and sandscaping around Happisburgh would have a dramatic effect on slowing the march of erosion but funding is simply not there.

"Happisburgh is not essential to the UK economy and therefore of no consequence"....."Government reports all say that something must be done – but action is never forthcoming"



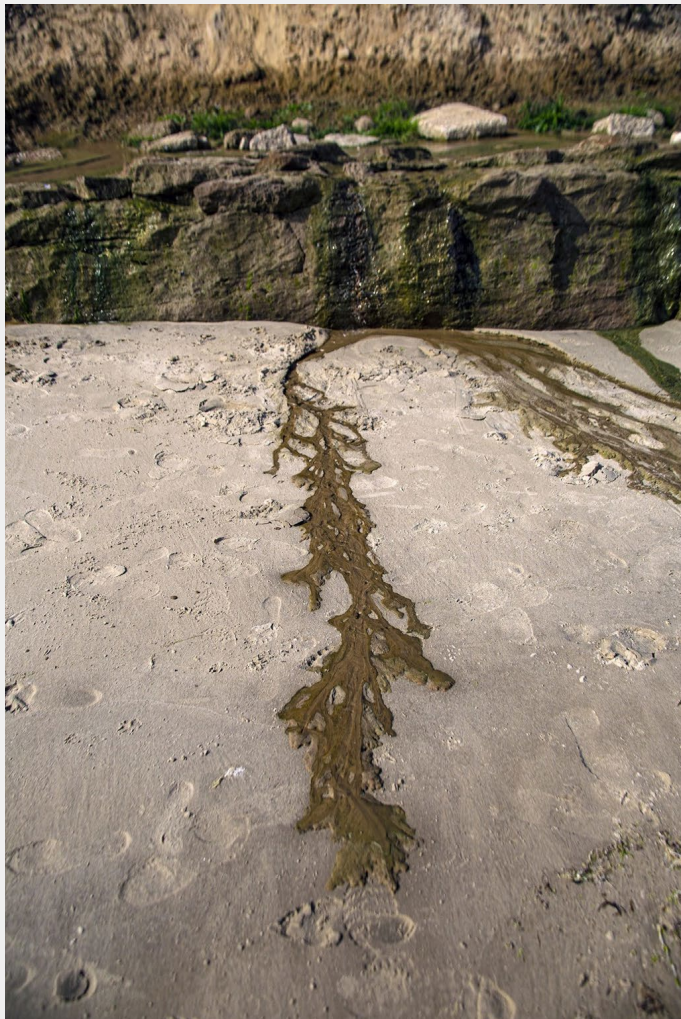
Exposed soft clay



Incessant crumbling
cliffs in the
unprotected Site of
Special Scientific
Interest



A ploughed field that
might never yield a
crop



Water seepage,
further weakening
cliffs

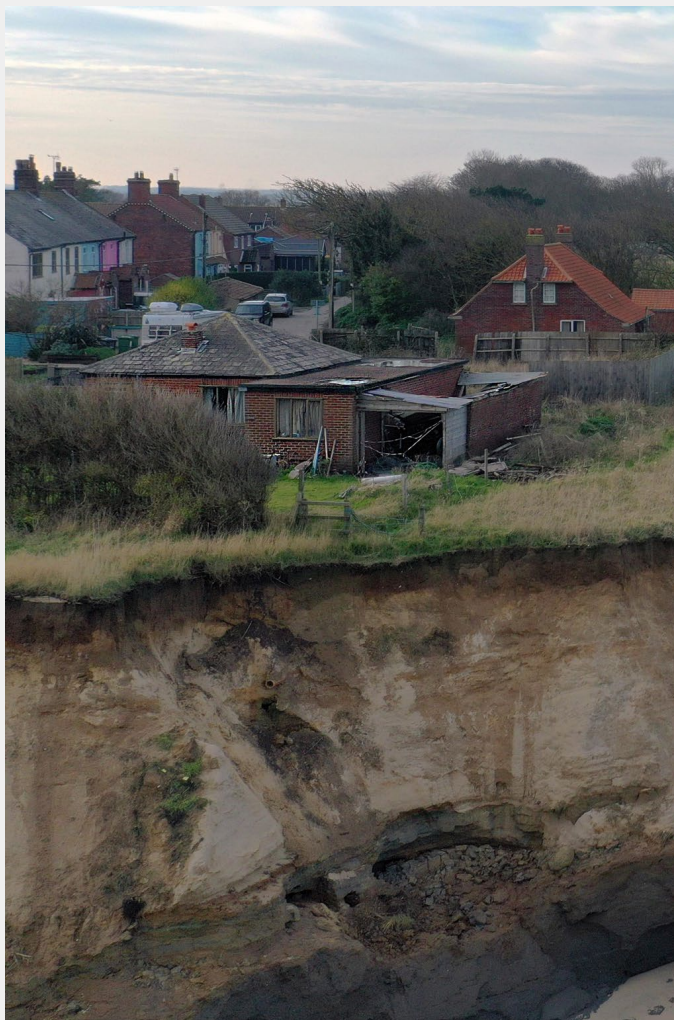


Sue and husband Rob's bungalow, "Seashell" is now only 30m from the cliff edge. They bought the property in 1979 when it was over 100m from the cliff edge. Erosion over the last 40 years has left the property valueless and due for demolition before it falls on to the beach. Seashell was due for demolition earlier in 2020 but the recent apparent slower rate of erosion has given them a temporary reprieve. They are both fully aware that demolition has to take place before the property surrenders to the sea, otherwise they would be liable for the clearing up costs should it collapse on to the beach.

Sue is very stoic and will not panic despite the fact that once the property is demolished, there is little or no compensation available to them. They feel that the longshore drift caused by the Bacton sandscaping project has slowed down the erosion at Happisburgh and the need to organize demolition is on hold.

" The Rock Armour needs to be improved and with sandscaping all could be saved but no one is doing anything"

Meanwhile, Seashell has lost half of its garden and sits precariously close to the edge.....



“Seashell”
precariously close to
the edge



Stephen is the Chairman of the Friends of Happisburgh Lighthouse, the UK's only independently run lighthouse. Built in 1791 it was saved as a working light by the local community, and is maintained and operated entirely by voluntary contributions.

He believes that the community should do all it can to develop a strong relationship with Vattenfall, a Dutch company that has been granted permission to build and maintain an offshore wind farm that will be make landfall under Happisburgh beach. He believes that it is a real potential benefit to the village (and the environment) and can't see why Vattenfall cannot be persuaded to pay for or contribute to sandscaping along the Happisburgh beach in the same way that Shell has made the greater contribution towards the protection at Bacton.

"If North Norfolk District Council were happy to contribute to the Bacton initiative, then why not Happisburgh?"



Happisburgh Lighthouse
will disappear within a
maximum of 50 years



As will Grade 1 listed
St Mary's church



Sandscaping the beach at Bacton. A solution for Happisburgh?



The end of the
road unless a
solution is found