

Happisburgh - The Village Falling into the Sea

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Happisburgh - The village falling into the sea

Over 30 homes have succumbed to the sea in recent years and at the present rate of cliff erosion more will follow in the next 5-8 years.

The wooden sea defences have been neglected for so many years and are now virtually useless.

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covers a large area of cliff face meaning that no new defences can be allowed to protect them.

For some residents, their only assets are their homes which are virtually worthless as the cliffs fall and the sea advances.





*Remains of rear garden △
Remaining houses in Beach Road ▷*



Managing the Coast in a Changing Climate

Coastal communities, infrastructure and landscapes already face threats from flooding and coastal erosion.

These threats will increase in the future, some coastal communities and infrastructure are likely to be unviable in their current form. This problem is not being confronted with the required urgency or openness.

Substantial coastal adaptation is possible and could deliver multiple benefits. However, it requires long-term commitment and proactive steps to inform and facilitate change in social attitudes.

Climate Change Committee 2018





Defenceless II △
Defenceless III ▷



Shoreline Management Plans

Long-term Shoreline Management Plans for coastal areas in England cannot be relied on to solve the problem (of erosion) as they are not legally-binding and contain unfunded proposals.

The Committee finds that plans for the coast are not realistic about the implications of climate change, and are not backed up with funding or legislation.

As the climate changes the current approach to protecting the English coastline is not fit for purpose.

Climate Change Committee Report October 2019





Road to Nowhere I △
Road to Nowhere II ▷



Adaptation

Buying time to allow “adaptation” is the only viable solution for Happisburgh.

Adaptation was started through the 2009 Pathfinder fund which supported the re-siting of the caravan park that was literally falling into the sea as well as supporting those in Beach Road whose houses were to be demolished.

However, there is little hope that further adaptation can be achieved without financial support.

Road to old car park and 11 houses - all gone ▷



Progress in adapting to climate change

Climate Change Committee Report to Parliament
June 2021

The Government does not currently offer direct compensation for individual properties at risk from coastal change, and losses are generally uninsurable.

The irreversibility of properties lost to coastal erosion means the potential risk impact for affected households is extreme, particularly as losses are uninsurable.

The absence of a national dataset of properties lost to coastal erosion or tracking of SMP (Shoreline Management Plan) policy implementation mean it is not possible to monitor progress in managing coastal erosion risk.

It is vital that the Government allocates resources to the collection of these baseline data if the change in exposure or the viability of the coastal local plans that use the SMPs as their evidence base is to be assessed.





*The North Norfolk Coastal Path △
Awaiting demolition ▷*



Bryony

Bryony lives less than 40m from the cliff edge and is aware that her home has limited life. A maximum of 10 years but much less if the severe storms of 2013 recur. She lives alone with her two cats and her 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 on to the beach as the cliff gave way.

She says that she has only recently come to terms with the trauma the experience caused her but the recent cliff falls 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 and Cart Gap, with its sea wall can be preserved then why not Happisburgh?"

"A number of us in Happisburgh have had enough of being told that we have to stand by and do nothing while our village is eroded away from under our feet"



Clive

Clive is the landlord of the Grade II listed Hill House Inn which dates back to 1540 and has been a pub for over 350 years. He and his wife Sue 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 50 yards of cliff has disappeared in recent years and the caravan park has moved.

"Happisburgh, although an important example of our Norfolk heritage with 18 listed buildings, including a Norman church (Grade 1) is not considered essential to the UK economy and therefore is treated as of no consequence"*

"Government reports all acknowledge that something must be done but action is very slow in coming and time is running out"

The harsh reality is that living by the coast in the UK, you stand to lose everything you own — your home, your business and your livelihood — everything — and you are not entitled to any help from anyone (apart from a small grant towards the demolition of your property before it falls into the sea"

"It's not a situation that any UK government can be proud of"





Nicola


Nicola lives next door to Bryony and like her neighbour, 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. She finds the situation unnerving and is under no illusion that she will lose the house without any compensation. 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.

She lost both her parents and her husband within a few years of each other recently. 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.


“I have to keep cheerful for the sake of my children, so I laugh a lot — otherwise I would cry”

In 40 years this will all be gone ▷

An aerial photograph of a coastal town. In the foreground, a large green field is visible. To the right, a red and white striped lighthouse stands on a small patch of land. Behind the lighthouse, a row of houses with red roofs is visible. Further back, a church with a tall tower is situated on a hill. A long pier extends into the sea on the right side of the image. The sea is a deep blue-grey color.

"In coastal management there are winners and losers. The winners being those areas deemed worth protecting. The dilemma is what to do about the losers. Right now, we abandon people."

Robert Nicholls, Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research 2020



Ansel Adams, the most important landscape photographer of the 20th century said -
"Once destroyed, nature's beauty cannot be re-purchased".

There is clear evidence that the increase in sea levels resulting from melting ice caps and the heightened severity of storms that we are already experiencing will result in catastrophic damage to our coastal infrastructure.

The destruction of cliffs, coastal paths, salt marshes and communities are already happening yet there is no clear Government strategy in place to deal with the tragedy. At best it is piecemeal.

Once gone, the variety, excitement and the raw beauty of our vulnerable coast line will never return.

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