

## RESPONSE TO Defra CONSULTATION

### COASTAL CHANGE POLICY

#### SUMMARY

We welcome the Coastal Change consultation and believe that for decisions to be made about a sustainable future for the coast there must be meaningful practical support for those affected by coastal change.

We:

- support the proposals for a coastal erosion assistance package for individuals and the use of the coastal change fund for community adaptation pathfinders
- see this as a positive initiative which needs to give local authorities sufficient flexibility to apply within their communities
- would like a clear policy and financial framework beyond 2011 that includes better levels of support to individuals at the ‘front line’ of coastal change
- welcome the Community Adaptation Planning and Engagement guidance, and have already adopted its principles in joint Environment Agency / local authority engagement work on Shoreline Management Plans and erosion maps.

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Our coastal strategic overview responsibilities mean we seek to balance the needs of people, the economy and the natural environment in the long-term. This demands difficult decisions and open engagement with the public.
- 1.2 We welcome the proposals to increase support for planning, and engagement with communities and individuals across the full range of adaptation needs from individual homes and businesses to the natural and cultural environment. We believe that this package of support, ideally with further enhancement, is essential if an equitable and sustainable future for the coast is to be achieved.

#### 2.0 COASTAL EROSION ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

- 2.1 The Environment Agency is keen to see a flexible and supportive framework that recognises the distress involved in property abandonment due to coastal change. The proposed assistance package is a good start but is not sufficient to mark a meaningful change in the level of support provided by Government. Local authorities are best placed to administer support and it is important they can offer a flexible range of options to help those facing the need to adapt.
- 2.2 Development of plans, strategies and erosion maps will soon provide a knowledge base on which individuals can make informed decisions. We

estimate that relatively few properties will be completely lost to coastal change over the next 20 years or so and we believe a limited duration package for those properties may be the most sustainable and least costly option. After a defined time period individuals should be factoring in future potential loss into their valuations of their properties.

### **3.0 COMMUNITY ADAPTATION PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT (CAPE)**

3.1 The flexibility to embrace local circumstances and the emphasis on reinforcing existing engagement activities is a key strength of the community adaptation planning and engagement guidance. The following would all help facilitate this engagement, raise the acceptability of adaptation, and increase the likelihood of funding of community adaptation proposals:

- adoption of Shoreline Management Plans
- implementation of the Community and Local Government's new planning policy for the coast
- certainty of funding for local authorities
- continuity in the engagement work of the Defra funded coastal engagement officers

3.2 Ease of access to honest, clear information is an important element in community adaptation planning and engagement. We support providing a web-portal to link our online resources with other coastal stakeholder websites to encourage sharing of good practice across England. The Coastal Groups will have a positive role to play in making this effective.

3.3 We believe local authorities are best placed to lead the decision-making process on community adaptation planning, drawing on shared experience from the pathfinders.

### **4.0 LOCAL PROPERTIES, BUSINESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

4.1 Local authorities need to take account of local circumstances and ensure they are supporting those most vulnerable in adapting to coastal change. To do this they need sufficient flexibility in the approaches available to support local buildings and retain community vitality.

4.2 The existing networks of Business Link, Coastal Forums and Coastal Partnerships are best placed to ensure that local businesses are fully involved and have easy access to advice and support.

### **5.0 THE NATURAL AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

5.1 The natural, historic and cultural environments together form people's sense of coastal heritage and cannot be isolated in any adaptation planning. We want communities to be fully engaged and feel empowered to influence the outcomes of adaptation for all aspects of their environment. To do this, the scale of the problem and the implications for the coast and communities need to be clearly communicated. We have several examples of good practice that

could inspire and guide. These are listed in our response to the specific questions in the consultation at Appendix A.

## **6.0 CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 We welcome this consultation as a positive step forward in developing meaningful support to those affected by coastal change.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Further information can be obtained from Alison Baptiste by e-mail at [alison.baptiste@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:alison.baptiste@environment-agency.gov.uk) or Nick Hardiman at [nick.hardiman@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:nick.hardiman@environment-agency.gov.uk)

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## APPENDIX A

### ENVIRONMENT AGENCY RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

#### A1.0 COASTAL EROSION ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

***Q1: Do you agree that it is appropriate for Government to make available public funds to local authorities to cover demolition costs for which private homeowners are currently liable?***

A1.1 **Yes.** We are keen to see a supportive framework that recognises the distress involved in property abandonment due to coastal change. We want people to engage in the development of Shoreline Management Plans knowing that they will be supported if policy decisions require them to adapt to change. Without this, future legal proceedings on property abandonment could damage local relationships and incur further cost to local authorities / the Environment Agency.

A1.2 This assistance package will be an important aspect of how the new Coastal Change Management Areas (CCMAs) proposed by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) would operate. The eligibility criteria should include whether the property is within a CCMA.

***Q2a: Is the homeowner assistance package set at the right level to strike the balance between individuals taking responsibility for their investment decisions, and ensuring that local authorities are able to provide practical assistance to homeowners who lose their home as a result of erosion?***

A1.3 **No.** The package is a good start but in our view is not sufficient. A more equitable outcome is required than the provision of basic costs associated with abandonment of property as outlined in the consultation.

***Qu2b: If not, how could this be done?***

A1.4 It is important that people facing the need to adapt have a menu of financial and non-financial options to consider. For example, giving priority to those at immediate risk in the social welfare system or providing them with 'advanced options' for social welfare support.

A1.5 The baseline support described should be accompanied by a clear framework and a continuing Coastal Change Fund. The fund would enable local authorities to implement a range of community and householder support options such as:

- Purchase and lease back of properties at risk
- Payment to ease trauma and contribute towards a new home subject to an appropriate cap as per the Compulsory Purchase Order scheme
- Planning 'roll-back' to maintain community cohesion and identity
- Other options from pathfinders or studies of international precedents

A1.6 Other considerations include:

- Strict criteria for eligibility to reduce the risk of speculative investment and take account of affordability to Government
- Clear and consistent processes for allocating and administering funds
- Integration between options for adaptation, e.g. an individual losing a property should have a fair chance of re-locating within the community
- The trigger for payments based on the safety of the property
- Balancing coastal change payments against future engineering solutions. If payments have been made and then engineering works are carried out householders should be able to buy-back their properties that are still safe at an appropriate price.
- Learning from Europe and United States where buy and lease back is capped to discourage enhancements of threatened property and precepts on sale, and local taxation provides the local community adaptation fund.

A1.7 Government financial assistance could be restricted to a limited period. Development of plans and strategies and the availability of erosion maps will, in the future, provide a secure knowledge base on which individuals can make informed decisions on location. Over the next 20 years or so we estimate that relatively few properties will be lost to coastal change and a limited duration package available to those properties may be the most sustainable and least costly option. After a defined time period individuals should be factoring in future potential loss into their valuations of their properties.

A1.8 Whatever the package, a nationally consistent framework should be developed to avoid the perception of the availability of these schemes as a 'postcode lottery' purely dependent upon local authority initiative.

***Q3a: How should the payment mechanism for the demolition and moving assistance grant work?***

A1.9 We believe Defra should allocate this money through local authorities. Some local authorities already provide help to individuals and their advice should be sought on the process.

***Q3b: What evidence could be provided to Defra to support a claim for demolition and moving costs?***

A1.10 We believe that advice could be obtained from a chartered surveyor that a house is unsafe for habitation, or will become so imminently.

***Q4: Apart from the current plans to provide more information on coastal erosion through risk maps etc, what other ways could homebuyers be informed about purchasing on areas of the coast at risk from coastal erosion and to factor this in to their purchase?***

A1.11 We believe the conveyance process should have a mandatory requirement to assess the risk from coastal change to a property through the Home

Information Pack (HIP). Land charge surveys supplied during the property conveyance process should include flooding and coastal change risks.

A1.12 Additionally, specialised guidance or training could be provided for estate agents, surveyors, lenders and solicitors on the risk to properties and buyers, and risk registers/help lines set up at local authority offices for land registry or property searches.

## **A2.0 COMMUNITY ADAPTATION PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT (CAPE)**

### ***Q5a: Is the draft guidance useful?***

A2.1 **Yes.** Its key strengths are the flexibility to embrace local circumstances and the emphasis upon ensuring CAPE reinforces existing engagement activities.

### ***Q5b: Have you any suggestions as to how it could be improved?***

A2.2 We believe the guidance would benefit from:

- a short, accessible summary version that highlights the key principles
- a clear outline of which audiences will benefit from the guidance
- ‘signposts’ to other information and community planning and engagement guidance that puts CAPE and the options presented into context
- a description of how to contribute to its further development.

A2.3 It should be made clear that this is to guide the process of CAPE *after* policy decisions on coastal management have been made through the Shoreline Management Planning process.

### ***Q6: What other conditions/policies/support do you need in place to facilitate community adaptation planning and engagement?***

A2.4 We believe the following would help facilitate CAPE, raise the acceptability of adaptation, and increase the quality and likelihood of funding of community adaptation proposals:

- local adoption of Shoreline Management Plans
- implementation of the Department for Communities and Local Government’s new Planning Policy Statement for the coast
- certainty of funding for local authorities
- continuity of the engagement work through the Defra funded coastal engagement officers.

### ***Q7: Are there sufficient communication tools to support technical discussions? How could this be improved?***

A2.5 **No,** but there are many new initiatives addressing this problem. Technical discussions relate to two key areas: physical processes and the structural and legal framework of responsibilities around the coast.

A2.6 Our on-line resources that map flooding and coastal erosion will form an accessible source of information and link to other stakeholders' websites. We support providing a web-portal to link all these websites and allow sharing of good practice across England. The Coastal Groups will have an important role to play in making this effective.

A2.7 Continued development of tools such as the Coast Ranger model, handbooks and non-technical guides will increase understanding. The many existing forums working on the coast, such as Coastal Partnerships, should aim to share and distribute this type of resource wherever possible.

***Q8a: How should the plethora of decisions that involve community adaptation planning be made?***

A2.8 A clear governance framework to define roles and linkages across community adaptation planning is essential, such as a Local Strategic Partnership group that works with Regional Flood and Coastal Committees and Coastal Groups.

A2.9 Local authorities are best placed to lead the decision making process within a local governance framework informed by good practice, e.g. GO-East Coastal Initiative projects on coastal governance and regeneration. A national framework, outlined in the CAPE guidance, to provide the context of Defra's Coastal Change Policy, CLG's Development and Coastal Change policy and relevant national legislation, will support local authorities in this role.

***Q8b: Should there be local governance structures in place to support adaptation planning, or should this simply evolve without structure?***

A2.10 **Both.** We believe local governance structures supported by a national structure will give consistency in how any financial assistance package is administered.

***Q8c: Are there other ways that we could support partners and organisations in increasing their capacity with change?***

A2.11 **Yes.** We believe the following would encourage local authorities and others to increase their ability and capacity to manage change effectively:

- Sharing the outcomes of the pathfinders
- Funding for local authorities to ensure resources and specialist skills are in place to deal with CAPE on coastal change.
- Supporting the National Voice for Coastal Communities

A2.12 The Environment Agency will support partners through the sharing of technical information and expertise.

### **A3.0 LOCAL BUILDINGS AND PROPERTIES**

***Q9: Are there other approaches to avoiding neglect of local buildings and properties to retain community vitality that pathfinders could explore?***

A3.1 **Yes.** There may be merit in exploring a mechanism for time-limiting tenancies on existing buildings. This could apply for residences, businesses or multi-purpose buildings and would complement CLG's proposals for time-limiting planning applications in the Development and Coastal Change consultation. Any package needs to be flexible and enable local authority discretion to meet local circumstances.

***Q10: How best could pathfinders ensure that approaches to supporting local buildings and properties are designed to support the most vulnerable in adapting to coastal change?***

A3.2 Local authorities should be given sufficient latitude and flexibility in the way they approach providing this support, to take account of those most vulnerable to adapting to coastal change. The pathfinders can help identify good practice.

## **BUSINESS**

***Q11: Are you aware of any examples of existing sources of support and information enabling businesses to adapt to the risk of coastal change?***

A3.3 The Environment Agency has guidance and information to support those at risk of coastal change.

A3.4 Another source of information is a DVD produced by the South West Climate Change Impact Partnership in conjunction with the South West Tourist Board, which looks at how businesses are adapting to climate change.

***Q12: What do you think the role of Business Link is in providing advice and guidance on managing coastal change risks to business?***

A3.5 We believe Business Link could develop pathfinders to explore creative ways to involve and support businesses in communities at risk of coastal change.

***Q13: How might advice and support be improved?***

A3.6 We believe best practice sharing between local authorities and easy access to advice, support and practical case studies would be best. The co-funded Coastal Partnership Network in North West is a good example of a 'hub' of local knowledge and expertise which provides a range of information on coastal policy, management and access to financial support.

***Q14: What do you think are the best ways of ensuring that local businesses are fully involved in community engagement?***

A3.7 Business Link could play a positive role here (see Q12). Coastal forums can also provide an effective dialogue, e.g. Dorset Coast Forum which has representation from 170 organisations. Business networks can also share

experiences and encourage participation among similar businesses around the country.

***Q15: What incentives/support would enable local businesses to make use of sites which are unsuitable for permanent development or use but where there are economic opportunities in the short to medium term?***

A3.8 Opportunities for temporary premises such as through the CLG proposed new planning policy and business rate incentives would help. Also support to allow transition to a more sustainable economic location subject to local circumstances. For example, the proposal in the consultation document for the Meadow Cottage Care Home in Norfolk to move to a wooden built structure that it would be possible to move at a future date.

#### **A4.0 LOCAL AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

***Q16: How can local authorities prioritise supporting the adaptation of existing assets – are you able to construct business cases for this work?***

A4.1 'Local' infrastructure may link to infrastructure beyond community boundaries and across public and private sectors. Local authorities need to make full use of strategic planning mechanisms to inform prioritisation work for strategic infrastructure. A matrix of vulnerability, importance to the community, and opportunities involved will help local authorities prioritise support .

***Q17: What advice/topics would be helpful to be covered in the next update to the Department for Transport's 'Policies and Best Practice Handbook' to help support you in transport planning?***

A4.2 We believe the update should raise coastal change up the transport planning agenda, encourage transport planners to consult Shoreline Management Plans when determining asset management approaches, highlight the risks from coastal change with examples, and raise the strategic importance of routes for evacuation and maintaining viable coastal communities.

***Q18: Do you have any examples of how best to do this, or ideas of new approaches that you want to share with colleagues?***

A4.3 We have examples from partnerships with local authorities and infrastructure / utilities bodies and would be happy to provide information on them.

#### **A5.0 THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

***Q19: Do you have any examples of good practice which could provide inspiration and guidance to others in dealing with the interface between the management of dynamic natural coastal environments and community wellbeing?***

A5.1 Communities become involved when they are aware of the issues, interested in the implications and feel empowered to influence the outcomes. We believe there is a need to communicate the scale of the problem, the power of the sea and the implications for the coast and communities. This communication needs to be at all levels, involving schools, businesses, communities and individuals. Environment Agency examples of good practice that could inspire and guide are as follows:

- Humber Strategy 'Coastal Futures' project highlighted stark differences in approach and acceptance between different communities and the variety of 'community wellbeing' benefits that adaptation could bring.
- Freiston Shore in Lincolnshire, and development of an 8km coastal 'country park' will benefit wildlife and local tourist business.
- Managing Coastal Change project in Essex (Defra Innovation Fund: SLD2315) is a good example of reducing hostility to changes in land management. It explores what is needed to help adaptation to coastal change, provides guidance and helps support coastal rural communities and landowners reach their own solutions to coastal change.
- Jaywick Strategic Leadership Group is addressing the challenges of a changing coastal environment and the involvement of the local community.
- In Shaldon, Devon and Medmerry, West Sussex we have positively engaged with communities to find ways of working with natural processes.

A5.2 There are other examples from the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and the National Trust, who also have a substantial resource of community engagement experience. These include the Cley / Salthouse project, the Titchwell managed re-alignment scheme in Norfolk and the National Trust's engagement work at Mullion and Charnmouth in Devon.

***Q20: How could we better involve the whole community in working with the natural processes of change on the coast so as to leave future generations with a more dynamic, resilient, thriving and beautiful natural environment?***

A5.3 The natural environment is the reason most communities have developed on the coast, but we believe communities will only fully engage when they believe that they will receive as fair a deal as nature conservation reserves.

A5.4 Examples of how communities can be better involved include:

- Promoting how coastal environments benefit tourism: over 100 businesses in Dorset use the term 'Jurassic Coast' in their marketing.
- Encouraging local people to help plan, research and even undertake projects that support a coastal environment, e.g. Blyth siltation study where the local community shared in the decision-making to appoint the relevant body.
- Co-funded posts in independent organisations give an independent resource that builds trust with local stakeholders affected by changing policy, e.g. the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Unit 'Suffolk Estuaries Officer'.
- CAPE activities to promote interdependencies between community and environment, especially when considering relaxation of boundaries /

conditions of nature conservation sites to accommodate roll-back of residential or business developments.

- Visual tools supporting community discussions.
- Regional conferences or events at county level help share good practice with community representatives.

## **A6.0 THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT**

***Q21: As the threat to heritage assets is likely to outstrip resources for securing adaptation options or recording, investment in adaptation or recording will need to be carefully prioritised. How can we decide which heritage assets should be prioritised for investment?***

A6.1 English Heritage's current survey and existing data from the National Trust's 'Shifting Shores' will provide base data of the heritage assets at risk and support our appraisal of heritage assets in coast management options. A pathfinder project could develop a prioritisation approach for heritage assets.

***Q22: How can communities be involved in the decision making process?***

A6.2 Approaches described in Section A6 also apply here. The natural, cultural and heritage environments all form the big picture of 'community heritage'. Isolating one from the other in any adaptation planning could diminish the local 'sense of place' and community distinctiveness that keeps the community viable and attractive to live in and visit.

***Q23: How do we ensure that we realise the public value of a heritage asset before it is damaged by coastal change?***

A6.3 English Heritage and the National Trust have the most experience in this area. Participatory approaches can help identify opportunities such as Clavell Tower in Dorset. The Environment Agency will use multi-criteria analysis to reflect the value of these assets in our project appraisal process.

***Q24: Do you have any new examples or ideas to be contained in the updated English Heritage guidance?***

A6.4 We have examples from Shoreline Management Plans and strategies where we have considered the effects upon heritage assets, e.g. the Martello Tower in Suffolk which was at risk during the development of an estuary strategy.