

NOTES FROM THREE VILLAGE MEETINGS HELD ON:

7:30pm on TUESDAY 8th APRIL, 2008, AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH, HICKLING,
7:30pm on WEDNESDAY 9th APRIL, 2008, AT POTTER HEIGHAM VILLAGE HALL
7:30pm on TUESDAY 15th APRIL, 2008, AT SEA PALLING VILLAGE HALL

All 3 meetings were chaired by Malcolm Kerby of Coastal Concern Action Group in conjunction with Norman Lamb MP and were organised to give villagers the chance to voice their concerns following recent newspaper reports on Natural England plans to "abandon sea defences" in this area.

Peter Boggis gave the opening address at the Hickling meeting:

A few days ago the Secretary of State for the Environment & Rural affairs, Hillary Benn, is reported to have said "we can't hold back mother nature" I agree, but we can make it tough for her.

This we have all known for many years. Hence we should know how to deal with the threats that nature challenges us with. There **should be** the will to face these challenges, for there is nothing more natural than for man to stand up & fight for his home and the way of life that he enjoys. It was a British freedom something to be very proud of. It seems to be forgotten that every yard of coast lost is a yard closer to Cambridge, Peterborough or Bury St Edmunds on sea. It is in the public and national interest that the coast should not be abandoned as it protects the rest of the country.

The action to do this should be starting now, not like we have seen on the Blyth Valley where hundreds of thousands of pounds were spent on pseudo-science to form an excuse to try and confuse the public, after the Partners, or should we call them the 'axis of evil' had agreed to introduce a new policy for the sea defence, of 'walking away,' apparently ignoring completely the consequences of their actions on humans.

What is a major concern to us all, is, this going to be the future of the low-lying Norfolk coastal areas. It is already threatened to the low-lying Suffolk coastal areas, the Alde, the Ore, the Deben, etc. Sadly there is this immoral panic to give this nation to the sea. The proven sea level rises on this section of the coast is only approx. half the rate that Defra suggests and has been going on for thousands of years. May be in 25 years time we shall have more accurate projections. In the meanwhile the nation should hold the line and learn, instead of blindly following the wishes of 'misanthropic fanatics' who consider themselves to be the advisors to Government who desire saltmarsh and fossils rather than areas safe for humans to live, enjoy and grow food. The advice that has been given over many years is far from the best for they do not respect Property or Human rights and lack the will to protect and conserve, which is what they were conceived to do.

To neglect it, or even consider abandoning the local sea defence is almost criminal, it is such an **important national asset**. Representing in today's costs hundreds of millions of pounds of expenditure. Meet the sea, do not be cowards and slink away.

All 3 meetings were well attended with a total attendance of approximately 1,000 (400 + 400 +200)

Norman Lamb MP made everyone aware that the meetings were not to sensationalise or exaggerate the claims made in the papers, that the plan was a **draft** plan, **one of four options**, not one that was finalised. The fact that this was now public knowledge made it necessary to discuss the plan and the effect the publication had had on the communities.

All 3 meetings brought up similar questions & responses from the local communities & the main points raised and discussed are listed below

- 1) Property had already been blighted with several house sales falling through after the press leak and consequently revised lower valuations. One woman was told to lower her price from £159,000 to £147,000. People were worried that they wouldn't be able to afford to move anywhere else & get an equivalent property. Evidence of the blight can be produced if necessary.
- 2) The fact that the proposals in the plan were for the future - 50 years time - hadn't stopped the immediate effect of blight & it just meant that a freehold property was reduced to a "leasehold property with a 50 year lease"
- 3) People who had invested in property for their retirement were worried that if they lost their investment their pensions would be compromised & having to rent somewhere out of their pension money would leave them with a severely low income.
- 4) What effect will this have, if any, on property insurance, if property becomes uninsurable it will also become un-mortgageable. Will the Government/Natural England assist with flood claims for uninsurable properties? Properties are not insured against cliff erosion & when these properties get closer to the edge even fire insurance is withdrawn. Properties that were flooded in November at Walcott have had their insurance premiums doubled or trebled. The ABI (Assoc. of British insurers) have warned the government that if it doesn't do its bit to reduce the risk of flooding it will withdraw insurance from flood prone areas.
- 5) The Netherlands have problems with low lying areas & are constantly updating their sea defences, they are not giving up their country to the sea so why are we?
- 6) There is a great need for land, not only for housing, but for growing crops, for recreational purposes, etc, So why should we allow so much land to be lost to the sea?
- 7) Other European countries recognise the fact that some areas cannot justifiably be defended but unlike this country they have a system of compensation in place to relocate the people affected.
- 8) The Government spends too much of our money defending other countries and should be spending realistic amounts of money on defending its own country. It's our money, we should have a say in how its spent!
- 9) The money was found to put defences in in the 1950's when this country was recovering from the cost of World War II, we are supposed to be one of the richer countries of the world and the Government must be persuaded that the funding of sea defences should be a much higher priority than it is at the moment.
- 10) Lawyers attending the meetings brought up 'The Human Rights Act' & were very interested in pursuing Articles 1, 8 & 14, particularly with regard to discrimination in choosing to protect some areas at the expense of others. If in the wider public interest certain areas are abandoned to enable money to be spent elsewhere, there should be social justice, and it was agreed that this should be looked at in more detail to ascertain viability.
- 11) How can quango's, with no elected members, have this much power over our lives? Although the Treasury has the final say over funding for schemes, people are worried that no one is listening to their concerns & decisions are being made behind closed doors was the potential to devastate a great many lives without proper consultation with those that will be affected.
- 12) Dredging off our coast should be halted until independent studies can be done to determine whether or not dredging does exacerbate coastal erosion.
- 13) Awareness of the need for increased funding of coast protection must be brought to a national level. 16.9 million people live within 10km of the coast in this country & more & more areas are finding themselves with problems from failing sea defences. CCAG are in contact with other

action groups all around the country in fact they have set up a new website <http://www.nvcc.org.uk> (National Voice of Coastal Communities) & it is hoped that people will use this as a forum to put their views & enable all groups to join together as one.

- 14) Some progress had been achieved with regard to social justice & the Government had put £30million over three years aside for an adaptation tool kit - although peanuts in the wider scheme, it was a start, and at last an acknowledgement of the need for social justice.
- 15) It was agreed at all meetings that people would lobby their MPs, MEPs, Natural England & the Government, & Norman Lamb agreed to run a Parliamentary Petition, details of which could be found on the new website, CCAG'S website & in the local parish newsletters/magazine (thanks to Neville, Rector of Hickling & surrounding parishes for agreeing to put in parish news)
- 16) Has the actual cost of everything that would be lost where sea defences are abandoned, not just property, but infrastructure, loss of tourism, loss of crops, extra health costs dealing with stress, relocation of people in social housing etc. ever been calculated? Surprisingly the answer is no, only the cost of actual property lost is down. NNDC (North Norfolk District Council) has commissioned a report on the real costs involved in abandoning sea defences.
- 17) Could villages have follow up meetings with representatives from Natural England & where can they get hold of the revised plan when it comes out in a few week? Details will be put on CCAG website & if further meetings were requested Norman Lamb would try to get representatives from Natural England to attend.
- 18) If the Government won't acknowledge its responsibilities can communities join together & pay for their own defences? This may be possible but sometimes when you put defences in one place it can have a detrimental effect on surrounding areas. Not everyone can afford to put money towards defences & why should they when they already pay taxes.
- 19) How much money did the Thames Barrier cost? & any additions to it? There's money available for protection when the Government so wishes.
- 20) Do any of the people responsible for producing these plans actually live in the affected area?
- 21) With rising sea levels & global warming shouldn't we be increasing our flood & sea defences instead of reducing them?

These are the main, resuming points from the meetings, and the attendance at the meetings show the strength of feeling of the local communities.

The vast majority agree that the coast must be defended, **social justice must** be included in any plan & the local communities will **fight for their rights** in accordance with the Human Rights Act if necessary. They will petition the Government for assurances that this area will be defended.

Norman Lamb agreed to keep communities informed & said that the Assoc of Town & Parish Councils will be organising a meeting for councillors to get together who could then report back to their parishes.