

THE COASTAL COMMUNITY

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What Is The Coastal Community?

If we are to consider the coastal community, we need to first determine what the coast is, and why we are to consider it.

Intuitively we think of the coast as the strip of land that is adjacent to the sea. However, this is not as simple as it seems.

If we view the sea as that stretch of water that is subject to tidal flows, then the coast in Suffolk would reach into the Broads, go as far as Woodbridge, and into the heart of Ipswich.

However, if we take a strict view of where the coast is located, we might be missing something.



An Alternative View

If we were to think about why we are considering the coast, we could take a different view.

Within the timeframe we are considering, we can take the view that disruptive climate change will start to be felt.

The impact of disruptive climate change will be felt on the water cycle, and disruptions to the flows of water that result.

There are two possible affects of disruptive climate change upon the coast – rising sea levels and the prospect of flooding.

Of the two, flooding is more likely to be the more serious threat than rising sea levels. If we are to consider flooding as an issue, then we also have to give some thought to upstream water flows.



A Changing Climate

It needs to be noted that climate change has a geological timescale – dramatic events do not happen in short periods of time (i.e. decades).

Although the average of events may change only very slowly, the dispersion around that mean may change dramatically in short periods of time.

For example, we are seeing new patterns of rainfall being established, where broadly the same amount of rain falls, but upon fewer days in the year.

It is quite possible that, by 2030, our rainfall will become more intermittent, be subject to a greater number of storms, and that we shall experience a greater number of more extreme tidal events.



A Community Impact

Whether or not disruptive climate change has a greater or lesser community impact depends critically upon the land use within the community.

Along the Suffolk coast, there are three main land uses – leisure (particularly the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths), residential (particularly along the ‘Golden Triangle’), and industrial (especially Felixstowe and Lowestoft).

Within this framework are specific vulnerabilities from flooding. Most of these vulnerabilities are the result of externalities in the land use elsewhere along the water cycle.

The main policy issue for the coastal community in the years to 2030 will be resolving these complex land use externalities.



An Example Of Community Impact

The Blyth Valley provides us with an interesting example of some of the conflicting issues around the externalities of flooding.



Within this area are three competing interests: there is the residential land use in Southwold, the valley is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and it contains the A12 link between Lowestoft and the rest of the Suffolk economy.

The area is tidal and prone to flooding. When this occurs, it is not uncommon for the A12 to be closed by flooding. This is likely to increase in the years to 2030, and that causes the conflict of interests.



An Example Of Community Impact

It is by no means certain which interest should be given priority. If we start from the perspective of the economy, one solution to the A12 being closed during flooding would be to have a bridge built across the valley from Southwold Covert to Toby's Walks.

Such a construction would diminish the view of Blythburgh Church from across the valley, and diminish its leisure role as an area of great beauty. To preserve the vista, occasional flooding of the A12 would have to be accepted.

The residents at Southwold might express an interest either way. On the one hand, a bridge would keep the town accessible, but it would also diminish the beauty of the town as a place to live.

Resolving conflicts such as this may become more frequent out to 2030.



Where Are we Now?

The infrastructure assets that we have inherited presume a specific set of climate (water cycle) conditions.

The assumptions that lie behind this infrastructure is set to change significantly, and in a short space if time.

As the infrastructure needs to be realigned, a set of externalities will arise that will help to shape the nature of public provision in the years to come.

Do we have adequate policy mechanisms to resolve those conflicting interests? Do we have a framework in which the benefit of one interest adequately compensates the disbenefit of another interest?

