

# Coastal Adaptation at Happisburgh



Happisburgh is a village on the North Norfolk Coast with a population of approximately 1400 people. The village boasts a 14th century listed stone church, the only independently run lighthouse in Great Britain, as well as traditional services such as a pub and post office. It has been a location of international interest, not just because of the impacts of erosion, but also the discovery of a series of early human footprints dating back 800,000 years.

Happisburgh lighthouse



The cliffs at Happisburgh are six to ten metres in height, and comprise of sands, silts and clay much like the rest of North Norfolk, making them very soft and susceptible to erosion. Coastal policy for Happisburgh in recent years has changed from 'Hold the Line' to 'Managed Realignment'.

This change occurred as it was considered that there was no sustainable short or long term option for coast defence due to coastal processes, sea level rise and national policy.

Failing defences and the change in coastal policy means that there is a need to manage the changing coastline through 'adaptation'.



Happisburgh beach, busy during the summer months

Adaptation to coastal change is often not the most attractive option to local communities over coast protection projects. However, in circumstances where it is not possible to protect, adapting to coastal change is the only practical option. In preparing for adaptation, the community at Happisburgh worked with North Norfolk District Council (NNDC) to jointly fund a temporary rock sea defence to control erosion rates in order to 'buy time' for adaptation measures to be developed.



Photo courtesy of: Mike Page

**Aerial view of Happisburgh showing the beach access ramp**

It is not easy to identify funding for adaptation but North Norfolk was successful in attracting funds from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA) in 2010 to trial coastal change projects through a 'Pathfinder' programme. The scheme aimed to explore ways of helping coastal communities plan and adapt to coastal change and Happisburgh was identified as a key location.

Projects included removal of beach debris, providing beach access, improving understanding of coastal heritage, re-provision of infrastructure such as a car park and public toilets and the purchase, demolition and replacement of properties most at risk. Overall, the projects were able to reduce coastal 'blight' and improve confidence in the local community while enabling those 'trapped' with deteriorating at risk properties to relocate.

Implementing adaptation measures such as those trialled at Happisburgh around the coast will become essential as sea levels rise and sea defences age. Coastal adaptation measures are not currently funded as part of traditional coastal protection, therefore the challenge remains as to how adaptation can be implemented.

**Further details of the projects are available at [www.northnorfolk.org/pathfinder](http://www.northnorfolk.org/pathfinder).**



For more information concerning the coast, visit [www.northnorfolk.org/environment](http://www.northnorfolk.org/environment). Or contact the Coastal Management Team:  
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