



Earth in crisis: environmental policy in an international context

Hold the Line Policy

Commentary

In the past the council adopted a policy of 'hold the line' by stabilising the cliffs. But under the new Shoreline Management Plan the policy is now 'no intervention'. This will allow the natural process of erosion to continue, with devastating consequences for some local people.

Paul

When we first come down here, they was doing the cliffs which you've obviously seen along the lees and when we first done our house they were actually supposed to be coming up, as far as we knew, they were coming up to Bell Farm Lane but then they just stopped for no apparent reason. So nothing's been done, so what can we do?

Ian Lewis

In the coming years there will be some serious risks to both property and to people's land as the coastline erodes. Central Government is currently looking at ways of dealing with that in terms of possibly compensation and various other mechanisms through the adaptation strategy which is currently under preparation. That may look at mechanisms for actually relocating people where they're at risk and indeed there are a number of properties here on the Isle of Sheppey that will start to feel that certainly within the next 5 to 10 years. But as time goes on, the number of properties affected will, will increase.

Paul

We are the last house in the lane and whenever we've approached anybody about it, no-one seems to want to know. As for where we stand on compensation if something happens, I don't actually know.

Tim O'Riordan

People are extremely irritated with what they see is a social injustice, that they move to an area, they've got planning permission, there were settled there, they created an economy, they're living happily and all of a sudden there's a threat that there'll be no further protection and they're left with nothing at all. So you can see why it is that the natural and instinctive political reaction of communities faced with this is to demand that the area is protected above all else.

Andrew Pearce

A house is the biggest single investment anyone makes. How we can start to ensure that people can see our decision-making is fair and transparent is going to be an increasingly big issue. We're trying to use an approach of engagement with communities rather than announcing our decisions to them, so they feel that they have an input into the decisions that are taken, but we also need to make sure that, that they understand we cannot provide everybody with the same standard protection, because the country cannot afford to do that and therefore, there is an issue of where is it cost-effective to defend and where is it more effective to retreat.

Tim O'Riordan

Holding the line means literally reinvesting in the defence which is currently in place. If you get to these vulnerable coastlines, not just in the United Kingdom, but all round the world, where you can only hold the line by recreating the beach which is constantly being taken away by intensive tides and intensive wave action and more intensive current, if you don't reinvest in the beach by taking sediment from the sea and dumping it on the beach and creating a whole new beach, then any coastal defence will fail because it will be undermined by the sea. So you can see that the process of trying to hold the line is increasingly expensive, especially if you have hard defence, because you have to hold the beaches in front of all hard defences otherwise they're designed to fail.

Andrew Pearce

The first generation of shoreline management plans mainly had 'hold the line' type policies but this generation of Shoreline Management Plan is taking into account the recent DEFRA guidance on climate change and we're starting now to understand that in the, within the shoreline management policies, we need to start ... adapting to the forecast sea level rise and starting to influence land use planning policies, primarily, but over time start to build new defences on different lines that are more sustainable.