

Sefton Coast Partnership Nature Conservation Strategy

Working Group: Coastal Processes

26 April 2006

Present:

Dave McAleavy	Sefton Coast Partnership (Chair)
Graham Lymbery	Sefton Council (Leader)
Paul Wisse	Sefton Council (Notes)
John Mulliner	Southport Shore Interest Group
Rachael Parks	Red Alert
David Taylor	Sefton Coast Partnership Board Member – Golf Courses
Les Baxter	English Nature (Volunteer)
John Miller	Southport Shore Interest Group
Ray Derricott	Formby Civic Society
Philip H. Smith	Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Mike Downey	English Nature
John Houston	Sefton Coast Partnership
Cllr C. Johnson	Sefton Council, Councillor, Church Ward
Gill Gentles	Formby Parish Council

Objective: Working with coastal processes – a dynamic approach

There was general agreement with the objective but it was felt that a clear definition of what is meant by coastal processes was needed.

Main Themes

Communication

Communication was the most discussed topic. The group discussed at length the ways we communicate, what we communicate and to whom we need to communicate. The difficulties of communicating the complexity and uncertainty associated with coastal processes and the future evolution of the coast was noted as a particular issue. There was a concern expressed that the media tend to report 'bad' news and may present a biased viewpoint. The media was seen as a vital tool in getting the message out to a wider audience.

A key theme that the coast is 'dynamic' and has always changed and will continue to change was identified. As well as any general message going out it was felt that it was important to have locally specific messages. It was also highlighted that there is a lack of involvement of younger people. The methods of engaging youngsters would be looked into by the Sefton Coast Partnership (DMc). Communication of policies, plans and predictions to the land managers was also highlighted as a need in order to make informed management decisions.

Education

Closely linked to communication is education. It was felt that there is a large amount of misunderstanding in the communities that has led to unnecessary confrontation. The difficulties of communicating the complexity and uncertainty associated with coastal processes and the future evolution of the coast was noted as a particular issue. The information needs to be communicated in the appropriate format to make it accessible to a wider section of the community as possible. Through appropriate education methods capacity can be built within the community.

Local identity and Pride

It was highlighted that each community will have its own distinct identity and expectations. But there was probably a lack of wide scale feeling of pride in the community with regards to the coast. It was felt that the fact that the Sefton Coast is recognised internationally for its management and nature conservation value this message should be more widely communicated and used to build more pride in the local community.

Accepting Change

It was felt that there was difficulty in understanding the changes that were taking place and accepting this change. There was a general perception that some people want things to remain as they are. It was also noted that some historic changes were felt to be negative and this may still be an issue with some individuals.

Confidence

It was accepted that the public had little faith in what they are being told. A natural tendency that anything coming from the Council is untrue and a lack of trust of English Nature were highlighted as specific issues to be dealt with. It was clear that the whole process needed to be transparent and supported by sound decision making at every step.

Uncertainty

It was felt that the uncertainty associated with coastal processes and predicting future changes, especially in the light of climate change, was a major concern. Problems of communication this to develop an understanding in the community was recognised as needing work.

Pool of knowledge

It was suggested that maintaining a 'pool of knowledge' for the long term would be useful so the wider community so that they have a consistent point of contact.

Climate Change

The main concern with climate change was communicating the uncertainty associated with any predictions.

Locally Specific themes

Sand winning

The sand winning at Southport has long been an issue on the coast, it was felt that implications of the sand winning were not properly understood by the general public. This lack of knowledge has led to misunderstanding. The operating plant is also seen as an eyesore.

Sand blow and Sand hills at Crosby

The problems of sand blow at Crosby are well known, however, the processes behind this problem probably aren't. However, it is also important to understand the historic changes and management at Crosby that have led up to this point. There are concerns by the public that not enough is being done to prevent the sand blow and accumulation on the promenade.

Erosion and Flooding at Formby Point

There was a general acceptance that there is erosion occurring at Formby and that hard engineering isn't a viable option at this time. There were concerns raised over flooding of Formby and when this was likely to occur. The relationship between the River Alt and the Coast was also expressed as an area of concern. There is some expectation from Formby residents that Formby will experience some flooding within the next 20 years.

Tourism beach maintained at Southport

A concern that the tourist beach at Southport could be overrun by vegetation was expressed.

Concerns with development at docks

There were concerns about developments at the docks that could affect the Sefton Coast.

Wider issues i.e. activities in Liverpool bay

Concern was also raised over the developments and industrial activities in the Liverpool Bay area and the possible consequences that may occur on the Sefton Coast.

Do trees contribute to coastal defence?

This is an issue which has been raised by a number of respondents in written consultation. It needs further discussion.

Implications of strategies and plans – linking objectives

Over stabilisation of dunes - need more dynamics back into the coast.

There was a concern that dune system has become too stabilised and some of the habitats that represent early stages in dune succession are becoming rare. The issue was also discussed in the Habitats and Species Working Group.

Importance of newly formed coastal features

Some of the most important features of the coast are 'young' habitat such as the new dune formation at Crosby and the Green Beach at Southport. These areas help to rejuvenate the biodiversity on the coast by supporting animals and plants associated with bare sand (many of which are rare) and in compensating for losses due to erosion in other parts of the coast.

Key Points

- Communication is critical at all stages of the process to inform and involve as wide an audience as possible. The media has a key role to play.
- Education is also a critical to help build capacity in a wider audience.
- It is important to make informed management decisions
- Community takes coast for granted and doesn't see the value of coast
- Confidence and trust is weak and needs to be developed
- Erosion and flooding is expected - by when and by how much is unsure.