

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Coastal Flooding and Adaption to Climate Change, HC 2079

Tuesday 23 July 2019

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Mrs Sheryll Murray; Angela Smith.

Questions 89 - 189

Witnesses

I: Malcolm Kerby, Coastal Concern Action Group at Happisburgh; Karen Thomas, Head of Coastal Management, Coastal Partnership East; Bill Parker, former Head of Coastal Management, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils; Dr George Revill, Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University.

II: Rachael Bice, Head of Environmental Growth and Partnerships, Cornwall Council; Councillor Armand Toms, Cornwall Councillor and Looe Town Councillor representing East Looe.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[– Coastal Partnership](#)

[– The Open University](#)

[– Cornwall Council](#)



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Malcolm Kerby, Karen Thomas, Bill Parker and George Revill.

Q89 **Chair:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for joining our inquiry today. Starting off with Malcolm, would you like to introduce yourselves for the record, please?

Malcolm Kerby: Certainly. First of all, could I apologise for my misunderstanding earlier on? I do apologise; I heard incorrectly.

Chair: Right.

Malcolm Kerby: I am Malcolm Kerby from Happisburgh in north Norfolk. For 20 years, I have been campaigning for more money in the system, because it is desperately short of money and funding, and for social justice. All we have had thus far is the Government machine coming along, doing a shoreline management plan and saying, "Sorry, guys, we are no longer going to protect you although we have done so for 50 years. Bye". That is not adaptation; that is abandonment.

Chair: I am sure this will come out through our session, so do not worry. You will get a chance to answer that. Thank you for coming.

Karen Thomas: Hello, I am Karen Thomas. I am the head of Coastal Partnership East, which is a group of local authorities in Norfolk and Suffolk managing the coast.

Bill Parker: Good afternoon. I am Bill Parker. I have recently retired from being head of Coastal Partnership East. I set up Coastal Partnership East. In a previous role, I was the lead officer for the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group, which represented about 60 local authorities around the coastline.

Dr Revill: My name is George Revill and I am a senior lecturer in geography at the Open University. We are coming towards the close of a three-year project on the north Norfolk coast, looking at public understandings of coastal change.

Q90 **Chair:** Thank you very much. The first part of my question is to Malcolm, Karen and Bill. Do not worry, George; you have one later so do not feel too left out. What impacts have you seen in Norfolk and places like Happisburgh because of sea-level rise and coastal erosion? How has it affected local people? Malcolm, that is your great opportunity to come in.

Malcolm Kerby: Thank you. We have seen enormous change in Happisburgh. We have lost tens of metres of our soft sediment cliff, and it is a very soft sediment cliff.

Chair: By the way, Sheryll and I saw the area so we know what you are talking about, but keep going.

Malcolm Kerby: I was not there to welcome you.



Chair: That is right. You should have been.

Malcolm Kerby: I should have been. You have first-hand knowledge of how soft the cliff is. It is not just Happisburgh; a great deal of the East Anglian coast is like that. It is terribly difficult to manage, obviously. One understands that not everywhere can be protected with hard defences. It is neither possible nor right to do that. What is sorely and severely lacking in the system is a mechanism where we can allow communities to adapt to that massive change. We have lost 35 properties in Happisburgh and only nine of them were able to move on with their lives because they were part of the Pathfinder project, which was designed and created in north Norfolk.

I was a major player in that and I believe that it is the answer to many things, not just in Happisburgh. It could be rolled out in many more places. It actually works. We are now coming towards the end of building nine replacement properties for the nine that we purchased within the Pathfinder and demolished. We are not just talking about rollback but actually doing it, and we are the only place in the UK, as far as I am aware, that is doing so. I believe we have a transferable answer to just this sort of problems. There is an awful lot in it.

Oddly enough, we were talking among ourselves outside the Committee before we came in. In Happisburgh, post-Pathfinder, it has just got better and better, year on year. The community now believes in itself. It has real purpose. Property values and saleability are up. The general sense of wellbeing is up. That is all post-Pathfinder and, as far as I am concerned, every year we get further away from the act of or the fact of Pathfinder, the better the scheme appears.

Chair: It is about how we take the community with us. Sheryll and I saw the terrific amount of erosion that is there. It is fascinating. We will build on this theme as we go through the questioning. Can we park it there for the time being?

Malcolm Kerby: Certainly.

Karen Thomas: Some of the main things we have seen are the immediate impacts that it has on people. There is obviously the loss and the fact that their property, in many cases, is completely lost. Leading on from the Happisburgh example, we have places like Hemsby where we have lost 17 properties in the last couple of years and we have many tens of properties that we know are going to come next in an area where we have sand dunes.

There is an interesting reaction from people when these things happen, not dissimilar to the five stages of grief. We have people going through different stages of that, whether they are angry or frustrated. We try to find solutions but, at the moment, we are reacting to some of these situations.



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We do have good learning from places like Happisburgh but it is very resource-hungry. We work with community groups. We were with the guys down at Hemsby last week. They feel quite disenfranchised and disempowered. They do not understand that we are doing things with national bodies to try to make a difference. They think they are very much marginalised. They do not feel like it is a national problem; they feel like they are isolated and it is an individual problem for them. As local authorities, we work very hard with our partners to try to support them. We are very keen to move on to the planning side of things.

Chair: Yes, you have the linkage there.

Karen Thomas: We want to move on to look for those next Happisburghs and say, "Right, what would we do before this happens?" We are slightly hampered by the fact that we are trying to react to the problems we still have with some of the communities that are very vulnerable at the moment. Getting them through the problems that they immediately face this winter will be very resource-hungry for officers and for them, as well as volunteers trying to help themselves. The one thing I will say is that they do all try to help themselves but we need some measures for short-term solutions.

Chair: With the Pathfinder houses, there had to be a method of planning to be able to deal with it. We will try to incorporate in our report how this needs to be looked at nationally. It is good that you have a local solution but it needs to happen elsewhere. Can we park that with you for the time being?

Karen Thomas: That is fine.

Q91 **Chair:** Bill, you are in a neighbouring county, Suffolk. I imagine there is a very similar situation there.

Bill Parker: Actually, when I was in my role, I covered north Norfolk, Great Yarmouth and Suffolk, or what is east Suffolk now, so I have experience across all these areas.

My observation is that this problem has been happening since before the last ice age, so it should not be a surprise that, when you have a very weak coastline and a combination of storms and isostatic rebounds where the land is sinking, you will have spatial change before you even get to climate change. We have collectively not been very effective in thinking about what spatial change is and what its impacts are.

If you go and talk to the people who are on the front line, as we do frequently, they are interested in options, and we have very few options to help them move on with their lives. How do we do that? How do we create opportunities for them to roll back properties, to move away or to sell their property? My recollection is that there was a newspaper headline in Happisburgh that said, "Property Worth a Pound". It should not be the case that, in a society that has been dealing with this issue, effectively, for the last 10,000-plus years, we still cannot get it right.



Q92 Chair: Sheryll and I found that the sea had driven in over 50 feet of that land in the past 18 months. The scale and speed is quite frightening. It was very good for us to see that. We will try to get something incorporated in our report that links in what you are doing in the area and what more we can do nationally.

George, your submission said that people can feel “daunted to the point of disengagement and inaction” by environmental issues such as climate change and sea-level rise. Can you briefly expand on how that affects people and how they respond to local challenges such as erosion?

Dr Revill: An immediate response from people who are directly affected, as we have heard, is to produce anger and antagonism, which ultimately can be counterproductive. Where there are other populations concerned, there is disengagement and disinterest, in so far as so many of these problems seem to be huge and intractable that we cannot find a way forward. The Pathfinder project, as we have just heard, and other examples of coastal action groups from around the country suggest that these ways of working with local community groups—

Chair: So other members of the Committee know, the Pathfinder project is basically where, because the houses are taken by erosion and demolished, planning permission is given for some more houses, so it is directly linked. That is just so you are aware. Please keep going.

Dr Revill: These are examples where coastal partnerships and working with local groups can help, because people can work together to think about a future beyond the immediate problem. There are a number of examples around the country where that is the case. It is really key to find ways out of these intractable positions where people butt up against each other.

Q93 Chair: We are going to see more of a detailed plan from the Environment Agency, but we have to work out what we can protect at the place where the sea defences are now, what we cannot and what we are going to do about it if we cannot. If you live in a property that has been there for generations, and all of a sudden it is worthless because it could disappear into the sea and it has been your family home for a generation or several generations, it becomes a real issue, which we will try to cover.

Malcolm Kerby: I am at the lowest rung of the ladder.

Chair: No, you are at the highest rung of the ladder.

Malcolm Kerby: I will take that. No, I am at the lowest rung of the ladder. I am only of the people. We would like to see everybody treated the same. There is a pot of money. We can all argue about the size of that. It is going to be too small for my liking but it will be the opposite for the rest. We would like to see that shared more evenly because you cannot insure a property against coastal erosion.

Chair: That is right.



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Malcolm Kerby: When you lose it, it is a 100% loss to the individual. We are seeing more and more of it because of rising sea levels and climate change but we are not the only people in the country who contribute to climate change. The whole nation does. We believe there should be greater involvement from the centre to take account of that.

Q94 **Chair:** Naturally, it is not the role of this Committee to get into planning because that is a local government issue, but you can create value by giving planning permission a way back from the coast. We need to make sure that people do not speculate on this, and that is an issue that I have also spotted. I am sure we can cover that.

Malcolm Kerby: I absolutely agree with you, and it is something that I have been banging on about for years.

Chair: Someone says, "I will buy those two or three properties along there because they will then be demolished and I will get something worth more further back". We have to be careful about that.

Bill Parker: For clarity, the Environment Agency has powers over about 55% of the coastline. The rest of it is with local authorities. There are about 80 coastal protection authorities around the coastline of England. They are quite small, which is one of the reasons why we formed Coastal Partnership East. When you are talking with the Environment Agency and others, the ability to do things, particularly on coastal erosion, largely sits with local authorities rather than the Environment Agency.

The juxtaposition between the two areas of responsibility can get very complicated. If you go to Southwold, for instance, in Suffolk, it changes four times on one frontage because the Coast Protection Act 1949 largely says that, if it is floodable, it is the Environment Agency and, if it is erodible, it is the local authorities. That makes no sense at all when you are talking to a community and you say, "That is the Environment Agency's bit and that is our bit", and the rest of it. It just makes life very complicated.

Q95 **Chair:** It is a bit like when you have dual authorities, whether it be district or county, or whatever. People are not really interested; they want a solution. They are not really interested in whether it is with the district, the county or the Environment Agency.

Malcolm Kerby: I have a great deal of experience of that because I, for many years, have been the link between the authority and the people. In other words, I have taken the jargon that gets spouted at us all the time and I have interpreted that and turned it into normal language for the people. I have been as far north as Redcar and as far south as the West Country. I have been all round the country talking to communities. One of the biggest problems, one dares to say, is not quite the physical thing—people understand the physical process—but the jargon and the nonsense that goes on to try to get people to understand. "We can talk about that section but, if you move six feet down the coast, we cannot talk about that section". It is a really stupid state of affairs.



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Chair: It is. With a Select Committee report, we can take a holistic view on it, and we will try to do so. Talking about the West Country, both Sheryll and I come from the West Country. Sheryll cannot go much further west. She is in Cornwall, though you are not in the west of Cornwall, are you? You are in the east of Cornwall. Carry on.

Q96 **Mrs Murray:** This is to either Malcolm or Karen, and to Bill. What engagement was done with the community of Happisburgh when the shift to management realignment was first considered?

Malcolm Kerby: It is rather complicated but, in short, nothing. Somebody comes along representing the authority, which is usually London, and they say, "We are going to do a new shoreline management plan". We all say, "Oh, okay". The next thing we know, months later, it is published: "By the way, we are not going to defend your area any more, in spite of having done it for half a century".

Then there is uproar. I was furious that people were not talked to about it. I conducted nine public meetings in the key areas down the coast and I spoke to something like 3,000 or 4,000 people, just because they had not been taken into account prior to that. I tried to say to the authorities, as I hope my colleagues here would testify, "You will never push people. You have to carry them with you".

Mrs Murray: We are probably coming to some further questions that we will have. Bill, do you have anything to add to that?

Bill Parker: Local authorities traditionally were coast protection authorities and they employed engineers to maintain coast protection assets. As we have already identified, you cannot protect everywhere and there is no desire to protect everywhere because life is more complicated than that. In the way that we have developed our effort, yes, we need engineers but community engagement is a really fundamental part of what we do as well.

There is a further strand, which is about generating funds and funding models. That is another complex and challenging area. Karen, did you want to pick up on Hemsby?

Karen Thomas: The lessons have been learnt from that SMP, in that you cannot just do things to people. You cannot just put a policy out there at the end of a process and say, "Live with that, lads". Across all the authorities that work in the Defra family, we are now much more aware of the fact that we need to bring people with us. The biggest challenge we have on the back of what happened at Happisburgh is that we are still in a position where we are only really engaging with people in this conversation about coastal change when it is already happening to them, so we are reacting to it. That automatically puts us into these crisis conflict discussions with people, when actually we all have the training and expertise now and we would like to move into the planning discussions with people about what may happen in the future, albeit that even that is difficult because, as soon as we turn up with a badge jacket



on, we are going to blight people's homes the minute we say, "Something is going to have to change here at some point".

At whatever point we start the process, it is not going to be very pleasant. Hemsby is a good example at the moment where that has been learnt. We completely understand that people need to come with us and that we cannot do things to people. We have a bit of Defra funding and some levy funding towards taking the Hemsby project forward with people there so we could have some additional engagement resource.

Engaging with people and building trust needs to happen before this happens to them, and that means either you have to pay for it from a local authority pot, because you resource it up, or you have a project running. What we have are not projects running. These are not projects and they may never become projects.

Q97 **Chair:** It is about how we become proactive rather than reactive.

Karen Thomas: Exactly. If you want to help start conversations about adaptation, climate change and sea-level rise with communities that have not been affected yet, to get them ready, that has to be resourced at the moment from a local authority that is already strapped for cash and it is not actually a project. When you get into a capital scheme, you can turn up and say to people, "We are coming; we are going to bring concrete; we are going to do X, Y and Z. There is money that comes with that retrospectively that can pay for things". That is the slight imbalance that we have. We desperately want—and CPE is demonstrating this—to bring some of that resource into our organisation and share it across our frontage. We want to put people at the heart of the conversation but we are just not quite sure at what point to do that.

Mrs Murray: You have probably answered part of my question. It is changing, lessons have been learned and the resource is coming.

Q98 **Chair:** Is it changing fast enough?

Karen Thomas: The other side of this is that you have to bear in mind, if a community is being that badly impacted by an erosion incident, that the officers who deal with that know that it is not going to be a very nice conversation; it will be very stressful. The politicians in the local area know that that is not going to be a very good thing for them because your community needs your support, and it will be all over the papers and everything else. For whatever reason people come to these things, we do not want to end up in crisis situations. We need to be planning.

The change is there. Going back to Bill's point about how many local authorities there are all around the country, and how there are different resources in different local authorities with different priorities, you cannot expect a local authority that only has one coastal engineer—which is effectively what Great Yarmouth was before it joined the CPE—to be having all those conversations while you are trying to fix the defences, maintain things and run car parks, for example.



Q99 **Mrs Murray:** Does the money mainly come from local authorities with a little bit of assistance from Defra? Is that a fair summary?

Bill Parker: There is a specific project taking place in Hemsby where we are getting some money through the Environment Agency and from Defra but the reality, apart from that one-off, is that it is all funded from local authorities.

We have started—and I am sure Karen will carry on with it—to develop a 30-year plan. Where are our challenges going to be on the Norfolk and Suffolk coast in 10, 15, 20 and 30 years? How do we start planning for that? How do we integrate it in local plans, economic development plans and so on, with all the elements in the local authority joined up, so we do not go and put something in the wrong place that we then have to defend in the future because we had not thought about it? We have some very interesting challenges at the moment such as a proposed nuclear power station. Is that really where you want to put a nuclear power station? Those are the sorts of questions we really need to have conversations about. If you project forward not just 30 years, but 100 or 200 years, if it is a long-term capital investment, the coastline will be completely different. The latest evidence we have had coming through in discussion at the Flood & Coast conference in June is that sea-level rise is going to be significantly greater than all the projections so far because of the vagaries of academics identifying what the sea level is. They want to be very robust about it. If you take some further work on that, it looks like sea-level rise might accelerate.

Q100 **Chair:** Any mitigation we do will take some time to stop sea levels rising.

Bill Parker: Absolutely. They will rise and that is a fact of life. That will put communities that traditionally thought they were quite safe under significant stress in the future.

Q101 **Mrs Murray:** Finally, Malcolm, could you be as brief as possible in your answer to this? The Coastal Concern Action Group was set up as a response to the problem. What were its key concerns and what did it try to do?

Malcolm Kerby: It was created by the people at the end of Beach Road because they were constantly going back to their local authority, the lead authority, North Norfolk District Council, and getting no answers at all because the system from the centre just blamed the local authorities for inaction but the local authorities had no tools to do anything and no funding either. There was a complete mismatch of understanding.

When the Coastal Concern Action Group was set up, it was my suggestion at the first meeting that we use that name because, as I said, we are a coastal community, we are extremely concerned about our future and we are taking action to try to bring something about. It was set up because there was total, complete and utter exasperation with the local authority and central Government. "Central Government" was just a dirty word.



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Q102 **Mrs Murray:** What did it try to do?

Malcolm Kerby: First of all, we wanted to find out why our defences were not maintained and get the defences maintained. I can honestly say that, at all the meetings I have done around the country with various authorities, the first thing I say to the community is, "Make friends with your local government".

Q103 **Angela Smith:** Could you give us the details of exactly how much funding you were given from Defra in terms of levy funding for your consultative work?

Bill Parker: I cannot give you the numbers because they have not been shared with us. What has been shared is that two research projects were identified nationally through the Environment Agency, one of which was a coastal project and one of which was an inland project in Surrey, to look at where communities are being challenged by major issues, how to respond and new ways of responding to it. The money is all entirely taken through the Environment Agency and we have about 70 days of consultancy time to support us. I am afraid I cannot convert that into cash because I do not know.

Q104 **Angela Smith:** Some of that is levy funding. Is that right, Karen?

Karen Thomas: Sorry, I may have picked that up wrong. I was just trying to do some numbers with Kellie. We had a presentation from ICARUS the other day and that question was asked. That is the group doing the work that is funded by Defra. I thought it was around 120k to do a project for a couple of years that allows them to come out and work with us.

Bill Parker: I was not aware of numbers.

Angela Smith: Can we just have some clarity?

Chair: You can certainly give us anything you have in writing.

Bill Parker: Of course. That was a very competitive process that we went through, in which we were shortlisted. Cornwall was another of the shortlisted areas. Lewes was one of the others. We came to Hemsby because of the focus and the challenge, and because of the capacity and the resource that Coastal Partnership East was able to put in to make sure there was longevity. Of course, other communities are also facing challenging situations on the coastline.

Angela Smith: Bill, you mentioned the need for a 30-year plan in relation to managing this threat or however we want to put it.

Bill Parker: Challenge.

Q105 **Angela Smith:** Challenge is a better way of putting it. Have you calculated as yet how much resource would be required to fund a project of that sort?



Bill Parker: No, we have not. It would just be incorporated within the day job of the team.

Karen Thomas: Part of my job now is to try to work out with the team what that 30-year vision might look like, and engage with our partners and local people about it.

Q106 **Angela Smith:** It must surely need some extra funding somewhere.

Bill Parker: The situation we are in today is that we need to focus our understanding of what the challenge is and where we think we need to put effort in. We have not yet done the scoping and we recognise, in consultation with our senior management, our planners and so on, that we need to do this piece of work. Unless we join up all these dots, we will create problems for ourselves in the future.

Q107 **Angela Smith:** That is an explanation of why you need to do the plan, but surely there will be a resource requirement, given what we have just heard about the need to take communities with you. I was in local government for 10 years, so I absolutely understand the importance of taking communities with you.

Karen Thomas: There will be a resource requirement. I have only been in the role for six or seven weeks so I would be trying to take it forward in a series of stages. One of the first stages is that we need to take the information we have had from Happisburgh and Hemsby, and look at how much time has gone into those sorts of things. We then need to look at the different places on the coast where we have an urgent and immediate problem to engage with people, and what we think the likely investment needs to be on the engagement side of things alone.

The other challenging thing we have is that we cannot just go and engage with people for the sake of engaging. We do not have all the options that we need to have in front of us, or the means for paying for those options. The other strand of work we need to do is to look at the adaptation options that have come forward already, the different types of rollback, the planning issues and everything else. We will have to work out how to knit all that together too.

Q108 **Angela Smith:** I will go directly to the question that I have been asked by the Chair to put to you, which is related to Karen's answer just now. I have to say that your answer, Karen, sounded suspiciously like the traditional approach that we get from the Environment Agency or local authority, where options are developed and put to people, and it immediately creates an adverse reaction because the groundwork has not been done beforehand to develop a sense of ownership by communities of the options. Malcolm and George, what does your experience tell you about how best to engage people in dealing with sea-level rise and coastal erosion, and what not to do?

Dr Revill: We need to engage people fairly early in the process, and that has come from what others have been saying. We have also heard that



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there are things that can be carried from the Happisburgh example, et cetera. All these places are different so the researchers who are involved with this need to get to know and embed themselves in that locality, and get to know the people.

People need to be treated as adults so that it does not become a matter of saying, "Here we are as a statutory authority", or whatever, "and we are going to tell you what we think you ought to know, and then you are going to tell us if you understand it or not". Rather, we have to find ways of working with local communities such that the knowledge they have in those local places actually means something and makes a difference in the planning process. That came across from the Happisburgh example. Again, that is different in different places because different places have different kinds of knowledge.

When engagements come late in the day, they tend to create a more antagonistic and oppositional attitude simply because the proposals are more firmed up, so people have to oppose them in order to get themselves heard.

Experience from elsewhere, not on the Norfolk coast, suggests that some of the coastal action groups that were started as groups to oppose what was going on, after a period of 10 to 15 years, are now working with coast partnerships to monitor and plan for the coast. That is better for everybody. The local people feel empowered by it. It probably saves the coast partnerships some money, time and effort.

Q109 **Angela Smith:** Malcolm, what is your personal perspective?

Malcolm Kerby: I could not agree more. When I came into it, it was already war. The local authority engineer and the coastal manager did not like coming to Happisburgh. They would be stoned to death. It was awful. We never got quite as far as the EA and Defra because it all stopped at the local authority. Because we were pitched into a situation, as has been identified, we were already too late. They were too late and we were too late. There was one thing I clung on to when I tried to overcome this. The local authority did not like me. I was a jumped-up oik; it is the usual sort of thing. I said, "This is the only way I can put it to you. How can we help you to help us?" In other words, we have to work together. We have to work together right across the board.

I have been so humbled over the 20 years, in that I have been able to work with Natural England, Defra and the Environment Agency. We were talking outside about how there is no animosity between any of us. It is very friendly. I have tried to take that back to the people, but there is one thing with the people: they do not suffer fools gladly. You have to be honest, even if it hurts. You have to tell the truth about it. It is no good fancying it up, giving it some name and plucking words out of the air. You have to be honest with them. Look them in the eye and say, "This is what we earnestly believe is going to happen and we are looking to work with you to achieve some kind of solution, even if it is not perfect".



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Q110 **Angela Smith:** That assumes that residents and local people actively want to look for a solution, which is a fair point.

Malcolm Kerby: Absolutely.

Angela Smith: It is a bit of a leading question but I assume that from what you are saying.

Malcolm Kerby: That is exactly right. There was never anything like that prior to CCAG, to be honest. The catalyst for that was when someone who knew everything parachuted in, created a new shoreline management plan and said, "Stick that up your jumper. We are not going to do anything else here".

Q111 **Angela Smith:** I have personal experience with my constituency of seeing flood management schemes presented locally. I have seen how they go down, especially when they are very badly presented, so I understand the point. Are there any examples of best practice elsewhere that can be drawn upon to help shape the kind of process that Malcolm wants to see when it comes to developing solutions?

Dr Revill: There probably are. The group I have just mentioned that is collaborating in management is the East Head Coastal Issues Advisory Group down in Chichester Harbour. Outside of the coast, there is a really good example with the Ryedale Flood Research Group at Pickering. Similar work was done at Winterton-on-Sea by Professor Tim O'Riordan at UEA back in 2007. That has been written up and had positive results, in terms of people understanding how things work and coming to terms with a solution. It was not the perfect solution but they understood why it was being put in place.

Q112 **Angela Smith:** Perhaps we could have some brief summaries of those schemes because it would help us to know what best practice might look like.

Bill Parker: I would like to highlight that, in Suffolk, there are a wide number of coastal and estuary groups that work very closely with the district council, the Environment Agency, the county council, Natural England and so on through the Suffolk Coast Forum. Changes in shoreline management plans, schemes or whatever always go through that process, working with the community and their community representatives. That provides a very good sounding board and discussion point. If you were to talk to members of that group who represent these different community groups, they would give you a very positive reaction and say, "We understand what is going on on our coast. We are part of that conversation and this is the way we need to work". It requires a huge amount of effort from community groups, putting in their time and so on. The Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership is raising £26.9 million as a community group for its work. They are on the front line of both the delivery and how to work with the coast moving forward in the future.

Q113 **Mrs Murray:** The Coastal Concern Action Group and the North Norfolk



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District Council worked to put the Pathfinder project in place at Happisburgh. How difficult was this and what did you aim to deliver through it?

Malcolm Kerby: First of all, the Pathfinder project was north Norfolk-wide, not just Happisburgh. We completed a number of smaller projects that we had a mind to do. The front of that was the EN12 planning policy, which North Norfolk District Council had already afforded to properties. That meant we were able to bring that into the Pathfinder process and create some additional value for the properties. It worked extremely well.

There was a lot of flak from the public, who did not really understand: "It is another new word—Pathfinder". We would say, "That is not us. It is central Government".

Q114 **Mrs Murray:** What did you aim to deliver through it?

Malcolm Kerby: We wanted to deliver a model of socially just application, when you can no longer defend where you have previously been defended, to allow adaptation for the community to move on.

Q115 **Mrs Murray:** Has the project been successful, and would you have been able to do the same without its funding?

Malcolm Kerby: Can I take the second part of that first? The answer to that is no. Without the funding, nothing would have happened. To go back to the initial part of your question, it has been a fantastic success. Year on year, it looks better. When we were lifting people out of the problem to allow them to move on with their lives, we also wanted to create a buffer zone so that we had some relief for a quarter of a century or so from the vagaries of coastal erosion, and we did that. It proved to be absolutely tremendous. The village has taken on the car park, and the income from that, which is considerable, all goes directly to the village.

Bill Parker: I did work for north Norfolk, but not at that point. However, I know the team members in north Norfolk who worked on that and they were determined that finding a solution for Happisburgh was absolutely central to what they were doing. I think Malcolm would agree with me that the individuals involved actually put a huge amount of effort in to try to innovate and come up with new ways of doing things because they recognised that Happisburgh happened to be the front line at that particular point. There are other locations up and down the Norfolk and Suffolk coastline, and other places in Suffolk, with the same thing and a similar model. Unless you have the finance to support and enable that spatial change to happen and give people options, you are really hamstrung and you cannot do it.

Q116 **Chair:** What you were saying, Bill, leads me quite neatly into this question. Current funding is focused on protecting homes and traditional defences. How could grant in aid or partnership funding be changed to better support adaptation? Where we do need to move back from the coast and where we do need to compensate people properly, how do we



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change it? It is not easy but, if you are going to get a coastal protection system, raise the sea wall and do all these things, it is all very traditional and the mechanisms are there. If you actually want to talk to people and work out a planning system like Pathfinder, there is no real mechanism at the moment. How do you see that changing?

Bill Parker: That breaks into two halves. One is flood defence grants in aid, which is the principal methodology of funding and a core funding stream. With the partnership funding system, in some locations that can be a relatively small part of the total picture, but it is fundamental. The current model, as you rightly point out, does not facilitate adaptation. Some work has been undertaken by Defra, I understand, which has identified that the Happisburgh scheme and other adaptation schemes have a benefit cost value to them and, therefore, we need to enable adaptation to go through the FDGiA process. At the moment, it does not, because you cannot apply for it. If the rules are changed, I believe that will facilitate that. The rules for FDGiA, in terms of the calculator—

Chair: You had better explain the abbreviation, please.

Bill Parker: Sorry, FDGiA means flood defence grants in aid, which is the core funding mechanism that is used and which the Environment Agency facilitates.

Q117 **Chair:** Are local authorities and local communities able to access that money at the moment?

Karen Thomas: No.

Bill Parker: Risk management authorities—internal drainage boards, the Environment Agency and local authorities—can access it. It is not open to other bodies. There are also various constraints. For example, local authorities cannot get flood defence grants in aid for preparation of a scheme but only for a scheme, whatever that is. There are a lot of constraints within the system that makes it very difficult.

Q118 **Chair:** It needs to be a pump-priming exercise. I am not sure that there is much to prime the pump at the moment.

Bill Parker: There is not.

Karen Thomas: That is the challenge we have. The flood defence grant in aid is the traditional approach, as you mentioned, Neil. It is for going ahead with schemes that deliver what people expect: rocks, concrete or whatever. We currently do not have an adaptation fund that will allow those short-term things to happen. The short-term things that need to happen are properly engaging people in a location and not necessarily delivering anything on the ground at the coast. It might all involve planning and moving people away, or it might just involve people having more information and making their own decisions about things. There is a need for that quite urgently. On the broader question of what we deliver



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and what is suitable to deliver in certain locations, there are more traditional routes we can go down.

The other challenge we have is the timescale. The Alde and Ore example is a good one, as is the one at Benacre, which you came to visit. When we have the opportunity and the time to talk to people, they have time to raise money and they can get behind stuff. Again, it comes back to this initial issue that we do not have an adaptation fund that allows us to do very much in the short term.

The FDGiA at the moment is used for adaptive purposes in the flood risk context and we have individual property resilience funding that takes a property out of flood risk if it is in a location where a whole defence scheme cannot be done, so what is the difference with a coastal property? There is that aspect of it.

The other side of it is that we often get funds on that kind of Pathfinder pilot type basis because then we are not setting a precedent. If we learn from it, that is great but we cannot plan properly like that. We have Happisburgh, but already Happisburgh does not replicate what we have at Hemsby. At Happisburgh, you have space to have a car park rollback and things like that, which is great for another place like Happisburgh. At Hemsby, how do we move an amusement arcade and an Anglian Water sewage treatment pipe, for example? That was not at Happisburgh. We still have to learn that.

Bill Parker: Going back to your question about the financing, there are issues with FDGiA that can be worked on but, if FDGiA is the wrong mechanism—there are completely reasonable arguments for that—we need to have a different mechanism. That means that there needs to be a different pot of money and a different way that we can access it. We also need to get smarter about how we bring other partners into that equation, encouraging further investment from the true private sector rather than local authorities or other tax-funded bodies.

Q119 **Chair:** That is right. The buzzwords are “some Government funding”, “some local authority funding” and then “private funding”, but it is about getting that private funding in. Through planning, as long as it was not abused, an element of private funding could probably come in there. The question is how we join all that up.

Bill Parker: How do we incentivise private investments? The way we have negotiated with the Treasury through the Local Government Association was that, if there was a flood defence grant in aid element to a scheme and if private investment put money into it, they would get tax relief. If you do not have FDGiA funding, you cannot get tax relief. You cannot get tax relief if you are an individual; it has to be as a company. There are barriers all the time that you keep tripping over.

Q120 **Chair:** We will try to tackle the Treasury. That is always an interesting one. We have heard that on the ground and I do take it because, if you



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are genuinely going to get private capital, there needs to be a tax incentive for them. We need to make sure that we do not give away tax—

Bill Parker: We have to be able to give something back for that investment.

Chair: Yes, exactly. Malcolm is desperate to come in there.

Malcolm Kerby: I suppose we were the original pioneers of external funding at Happisburgh. I created a company, limited by guarantee, to operate a charity. We got 50 grand in a month to assist our local authority to put more rock in, hopefully to give us another 10 years. We said that, if it gives us 12, the extra 50 grand is well spent. I continued to work to find a more sustainable solution. When you start talking like this, this is when the veins start sticking out of my neck.

Chair: I could see something was happening to you.

Malcolm Kerby: FDGiA, and this, that and what have you, is the quickest way to switch people off and turn them against you. You have to bring this down to—I am sorry to say—my level so that, if I can understand it, Joe Bloggs can understand it. If he understands it, he will buy into it. If he does not, he will send you packing down the road.

Q121 **Chair:** The message to us from you is quite clear: it has to be locally led. The other side of the coin is that we need a process that then leads to some funding through the system. I agree with you, Malcolm, but we also need to have something to connect the two. That is what has been useful in this discussion.

Malcolm Kerby: My view of connecting the two would be putting the funding back to where it should be and not at 50% of what it was 14 years ago. If we did that, we would go a long way to addressing the problem.

Q122 **Chair:** That is provided it is targeted in the right direction.

Malcolm Kerby: Absolutely.

Bill Parker: More money is always welcome and you can always do more, but the reality is that we need to think about what we do with the current money. In my view, it is about enabling access to that money, to deliver what we need to deliver on that coastline and to make sure the methodologies of approval and process are slim-lined, are as effective and simple as possible and do not become a bureaucratic nightmare.

Q123 **Chair:** That leads us neatly into the last question for you, Karen and Bill. We understand that you are commissioning a coast re scoping review, looking at how to mitigate coastal properties. Naturally, we did quite a lot on this committee in looking at the Flood Re. Flood Re, of course, has a wider number of properties affected and, of course, a levy was put on all properties in the country. How are you considering this coast re would work? Is that another idea of levying across the piece?



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Karen Thomas: It is open to a range of different options. We have not narrowed it down to any individual specific point at the moment. It is work that Kellie has been doing. We have a consultant who worked on Flood Re and had the opportunity to see some of the opportunities that we could bring across. Ultimately, it is about us looking at a whole range of different insurance solutions, and some of those lead into those rollback type options.

Who will fund it? One of the challenges is that we do not have lots of people at coastal erosion risk and some of them are not very well off. We have some quite big social deprivation issues in these areas. We are saying that we want something that is socially equitable and we want to explore that over the summer. We have some opportunities to talk to Defra about that coming up. We think it is about 75k worth of work. The local authority is prepared to put some funding in and we are trying to line up a couple of other local authorities around the country.

Q124 **Chair:** When are you expecting to pull all this together?

Karen Thomas: We are literally trying to do this at the moment. We have sent the proposal across to Defra. They are considering it. We have had some good noises. We are hoping that we will find out in the next couple of weeks.

Chair: If you are able to send it to us as well, we would be happy to receive it because it is something we can look at.

Karen Thomas: Yes, definitely.

Q125 **Chair:** The difference between Flood Re and coast re is that you are talking in some cases about total properties being completely gone rather than a possible flood once in 50 years.

Karen Thomas: Last week, we were talking to people in Hemsby who, up until that point, were saying, "We need to have rock in front of our sand dune". That is where they were, and we have been able, with officers present, to start to talk about these wider things. A short-term solution might be to put rock there so we can buy ourselves some time while we look at where there are plots of land or where there are opportunities. A small amount of money coming back to somebody is enough for them to perhaps get a mortgage on the type of property that could be rolled back in the future. We have been talking about lodge-style homes or buildings that can be easily moved. As Kellie and I were saying last week, Americans regularly move their houses around.

There is something in that. No one is ever going to expect an insurance package to give you the value of your entire home back, and we know that. It is about finding a way to have enough funding coming back to you so that you have some options, whether it is to remortgage, to go somewhere else and rent or to stay in your community if you want to.

Q126 **Chair:** Yes, there has to be some hope for the community. There has to



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be something that will enable them to live their lives in a different property. We would be really interested in that.

Bill Parker: That is an example of us having to innovate to find out how we can help our communities, which has led to a whole series of discussions. That is where we are at the moment. We do not know if we are going to find something but, driven by Coastal Partnership East, working with Defra and so on, we will try to find some options because that is what it is all about.

Chair: That is right. We all have to put forward ideas. Some of them will work and some of them will not but, if we do not, we do not move forward. It has to be innovative.

Q127 **Angela Smith:** I am reasonably familiar with Flood Re because of the work I have done as shadow Minister on water and flooding. It is a very finely tuned mechanism and was professionally developed by the insurance industry, of course, because the insurance industry understands risk and how to manage risk. It is a really interesting concept, the idea of transferring and interpreting the concept in a different way so that it applies to coastal communities. I just wonder how you are going to develop the concept and how far you are going to involve the insurance industry itself in developing any proposals if Defra supports them. I cannot see how a blueprint can be developed without the insurance industry.

Bill Parker: We call it coast re, but that is probably a bit of a misnomer. It is not a direct transfer of Flood Re to a coastal situation, but it is working very closely with the insurance industry and the reinsurance industry.

Q128 **Chair:** You are talking with them, are you?

Bill Parker: Absolutely, with the same people who were involved in Flood Re, who recognise there is a problem, recognise there is no current solution, and want to work with us to find a way forward. We are very much at the scoping stage, trying to find out how we do this, if there are different routes and options. That is the piece of work I think Karen hopes to kick off in late summer, early autumn, to take that forward. It may be a blind alley. It may be that the insurance industry comes back and says, "We are not interested". We are quite confident that, if they do that, it means there is not a solution, but we believe the people we are talking to will be very focused on finding a solution.

Q129 **Angela Smith:** But is it insurance-based? Would it be insurance-based?

Karen Thomas: There are several strands that we could go down, and there are insurance-based strands. We have a list of stakeholders who are insurance company contacts. The organisation we would like to work with on this already has all those contacts and will be working with insurance companies to look at insurance.

Q130 **Angela Smith:** If some of the other strands are not insurance-based,



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what are they based on?

Bill Parker: We can share that with you.

Karen Thomas: We can give you more detail on that.

Angela Smith: It is important.

Q131 **Chair:** Could we have that? It is a really good concept if we can get it to work.

Bill Parker: It is trying to innovate on how we can manage this change.

Q132 **Chair:** Exactly, yes. What fascinated Sheryll and me seeing the coastal erosion is the speed and scale of it. I farm in an area that has potential to flood, but not like that and not to erode at the same speed. In different parts of the country, there will be different solutions. In some places we will defend the area. In other areas we just cannot. It is about how we mitigate the problem.

Bill Parker: The issue we have, particularly on the Norfolk and Suffolk coast, is that the erosion rate is not predictable. You can say, "Over a period of time it is likely to be this".

Chair: Yes, it speeds up, slows down.

Bill Parker: It is not a metre a year because some years it is; some years it is more; some years it is less. That uncertainty is quite a challenge to deal with and work with.

Chair: No, it is. Thank you very much. That was very good evidence. Andy might come through to you. There are questions we did not ask you. If there are parts of them that we would like to ask you, we will give you them in writing, if that is okay. We very much appreciate your coming this afternoon. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rachael Bice and Armand Toms.

Q133 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Starting with Rachael, would you like to introduce yourselves? Then we will carry on.

Rachael Bice: My name is Rachael Bice. I work for Cornwall Council in our environment service as the head of environmental growth and partnerships.

Councillor Toms: Good afternoon. My name is Armand Toms. I have been a local councillor for 17 years now. I have been a harbour commissioner in Looe for 18 years, and I have been a local fisherman and trawlerman for 25 years, so the sea and the harbour have been the bedrock of my employment and everything.



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Q134 **Chair:** I very much welcome both of you today. Thank you very much. Armand, we will start with you on this one. What are the impacts you have seen in Cornwall and places like Looe because of sea-level rise and coastal flooding. How has it affected local communities and businesses?

Councillor Toms: It affects people in a number of ways. I can say what happens in Looe, but that can be replicated for places like Polperro, Mevagissey, Gorran Haven and all the ones up and down the coast. You name it; it could be exactly the same, depending on the wind direction. The storms we are seeing now seem to be shorter, sharper and more fierce. That is from somebody who has spent a long time at sea.

Chair: That is your 25 years' experience.

Councillor Toms: Yes, it is. That is an issue. The sea levels now are at six metres in Looe and the quay height is at six metres, so you have an equalisation of where the tide comes to and where the quay height is. It does not take a lot to overtop the quay, and once you have done that a number of places flood. It is said by the Environment Agency that we are the most flooded place in the country because we flood so often. The quay is actually higher than the main street.

Chair: Once it comes over the quay, it goes down.

Councillor Toms: Another trouble is 19th-century engineering. In the 1800s and prior to that, when they realised they needed quays for boats to moor, they just built these 12 or 18-inch walls and then backfilled it with the mine waste from Caradon. That is porous and therefore the infill has to stay wet. If it does not stay wet, it will shrink and buildings might collapse, so there is a double-whammy here of not just water but letting the thing dry out. Over the years, it has got a lot worse. We see it more frequently. The last flood in 2014 on 14 February was very severe. I am six foot one tall. I was stood in three foot of water on the quayside, so that shows the severity of it and the wave heights. I can show you pictures without any trouble whatsoever.

Chair: Gosh, there is a picture. We have a picture of you there I think.

Councillor Toms: It is important to the town that, when this happens, people cannot get flood insurance. People cannot carry out their normal business. You try and get your people in for Valentine's night when you have two foot of water in your restaurant. It does not work. It impacts on the commerce. That particular flood caused £560,000 worth of damage just to the quay walls. The town council own a small patch called the Mariners Garden. There was £126,000-worth of damage there. There was damage underneath the arcade across the river on the West Looe side and to the Mill Pool wall. The damage was probably in the ballpark figure of £800,000 throughout the town. For a small community, that is an awful lot of money.

Q135 **Chair:** You had the last flood in 2014. I suspect people are still recovering now in some ways.



Councillor Toms: In some ways, yes, because the impact of that is that some people cannot get insurance for flooding at all. That is an impact on the business. For weeks afterwards, people were ringing up and saying, "Is Looe still flooded?" They do not realise the tide goes out and it disappears. That is the general thing. It stops people coming. Therefore, it impacts on a town that relies on tourism. It has a big adverse impact if something like this happens. It stops people coming.

Q136 **Chair:** Like I said, I farm not far from the Somerset Levels. When Somerset flooded, everybody decided the whole of Somerset was underwater. Quite a lot of Somerset was, but not the populated areas really. Once people decide something is flooded, I can see how it would have that effect on Looe. Hopefully you are recovering now.

Councillor Toms: We are trying very hard.

Q137 **Angela Smith:** When it was decided that action was needed to tackle coastal flooding at Looe and other places, what kind of engagement was there with the affected communities? Did this change over time?

Councillor Toms: I am a harbour commissioner. The harbour commission decided that we must take the situation into our own hands. We invested £20,000, which is a fair chunk of money for the harbour commission, to get in Wallingford, a company, to look at what we needed to do. When we got the first phase of the report, we went out and spoke to the community. We did a proper consultation. It was 95% to 96% in favour of what we were doing. We then moved on to the next stage, with a bit of planning in behind and putting some bones on ideas. We again went out to the community and got a similar response of 95% to 96% of people wanting this to happen. It is important because the flooding will get more severe in the future.

Q138 **Angela Smith:** You have some inland creeks, as well as lots of buildings, so it impacts further upstream, I would have thought.

Councillor Toms: Yes, it does.

Q139 **Angela Smith:** They were all considered.

Councillor Toms: Yes. We made it a very open, public consultation. Cornwall Council came along, observed what we were doing and joined in. It was great because it was us saying, "This is the problem and this is where we have got to". Then we said, "This is the bare bones of what we would like to try to do". They have been great.

Q140 **Angela Smith:** That is good to hear. Presumably, Rachael, a similar process was engaged in as far as Polperro and other communities were concerned.

Rachael Bice: All the communities through the shoreline management plan process were engaged. The strength of that is that it is democratically adopted. The weakness of it is that it was not necessarily



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designed to be deliverable. It was designed to be democratically adopted, rather than deliverable.

Q141 **Angela Smith:** This is sounding complicated.

Rachael Bice: It is. At the beginning of the shoreline management plan process, there was a decade planned in to give people time to work with communities, to understand what is deliverable. Because there has not been funding to go with that, that engagement process has only been done in a piecemeal way and often in response to emergency events that have happened. Those that were flooded in 2014 and at other moments have activated communities, as you have just heard in Norfolk and you are hearing from Armand. There are many that have not flooded but we anticipate will flood and are not yet activated.

Q142 **Angela Smith:** What is the impact of that? Action taken in one area, such as Looe, may impact on others, in Tolland Bay or Polperro.

Rachael Bice: It does, particularly where the local authority is being looked to to top up the money. We have a willing partner in the Environment Agency, but its hands are tied with much of its funding, particularly because it is mainly capital funding that it can access, rather than revenue. As you have already heard, that is what is needed to unlock conversations with communities that are early enough and creative enough to create the solutions that make funds available for small communities with only small numbers of residential properties at risk. We do not have the resources to do that. The money the local authority puts into one community, say Looe, cannot go to another.

Q143 **Angela Smith:** It is also about strategically ensuring that the whole shoreline is thought through so that, in environmental terms, the impacts on another part of the coastline are not really negative. Does that make sense?

Rachael Bice: Yes, absolutely. This is one of the complexities we have. Because there is not always clarity around policy, or on funding, you then have private landowners coming forward, saying, "We will protect our own piece, thank you". When the local authority then says, "That is going to have an ecological impact on how the coastal process works in other areas", that becomes another area of conflict. You have someone who is trying to empower themselves, but then we get into conflict around that.

Q144 **Chair:** Also, they could possibly flood somebody further along.

Rachael Bice: The current tools we have in this basket are not coherent. That includes the risk management authority's roles and responsibilities. The different funding sources we can get hold of are often misaligned either in the way you can access them or in the assurance they are looking for. From a local point of view, it makes it very difficult to do the right thing for your community.

Q145 **Angela Smith:** I am just thinking of that stretch. Sheryll knows the area



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much better than I do, but I know the area quite well. You have lots of caravan sites and camping sites on this coastline, quite close to the edge.

Mrs Murray: Not in Looe.

Angela Smith: Not in Looe, but further along, between Looe and Polperro, around Talland Bay for instance. That is what I am saying. There is a real economic impact here potentially.

Rachael Bice: There is real economic impact for our tourism industry. However, those properties and residences do not count in the same way that a bricks and mortar property counts in the calculation of grant in aid allocation.

Q146 **Chair:** Theoretically, they can be moved.

Angela Smith: They can be moved elsewhere.

Rachael Bice: That is one of the things Cornwall faces, fundamentally. It is the disruption to livelihoods that flooding and coastal erosion will cause that is not accounted for in the funding calculator currently. That really makes the difference of us not being able to access as much money as we think we ought, to empower ourselves to make some good decisions and get ahead of what is happening. We have an excellent reputation of emergency response, because we have had some quite significant floods, but we are not able to be as excellent in our proactive response because of the availability of funds.

As you will know from mentioning your local authority background, the constraint on local government funding also does not enable us to raise council tax to bring revenue through either. Our hands are tied in a number of directions.

Q147 **Angela Smith:** You have a particularly complex coastline all the way round.

Rachael Bice: I think it is the longest coastline. As a unitary authority, on the one hand that makes it simpler, but it means that we have shrunk a lot of our capacity in developing a lean local authority.

Chair: We will cover quite a lot of that with other questions.

Q148 **Angela Smith:** Sorry to go back to you, Armand, but what were the concerns of the community when you consulted on the plans you developed? How were they expressed? Do you remember?

Councillor Toms: The bit that always comes out loud and clear is that we have an SSSI that spans the island and the mainland. That area has eelgrass in it and other things that need to be looked after. There were concerns: "You have to do the proper surveys. You have to do all the ecological studies and all the other bits and pieces, and prove it is not going to have that greater impact". If you look at the sea walls that are built in many places, they are built out of rock armour, and that creates an ecological area for things to grow, crustaceans to live and things like



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that. There might be a loss, but there might be a greater gain. We have to do that work.

Q149 **Angela Smith:** That was the kind of conversation that was taking place when you consulted on the plans you developed.

Councillor Toms: Yes. We have a good green community. They understand there is an impact but you can have a gain at the same time.

Angela Smith: That is encouraging.

Chair: Armand, you know who Sheryll is, I expect.

Q150 **Mrs Murray:** I should put on record that I have known Armand for a very long time. He used to fish with my late husband. In fact, he even bought a boat off me in the past and we sat on Cornwall County Council for quite a long time. I ought to make sure that is on record. It is lovely to see you here, Armand. Briefly, what have you learned about engaging with people in dealing with sea-level rise and coastal flooding, and how not to? What have you learned about engaging and the ways that you perhaps should not engage with them?

Councillor Toms: It is quite simple. When the harbour went and had a look, it came out and it said, "Here is some honest conversation. This is what we would like to try to do". It was said by the last group that was sat here. Engage with them, tell them what you are going to do, make sure they understand what you are going to do, and then carry out what you are going to do. It is no good saying, "We are going to do A" and doing C. That never works.

The second part of the question was how not to: say you are going to do A but do C. That is a big thing. Have that honest conversation: "This is possible. That is not". It is no good saying we are going to have a 200-boat marina out there when we know that the finances would be very difficult to get. That is the honest conversation you have to have.

Rachael Bice: I have a brief point. One of the important things there is having the conversation with the community first and understanding what they understand and think might be the solutions. However, the process that we go through, which is where the authorities make assessments first, often means we have spent money and have got, to some degree, attached to the solutions that the modelling is showing through the process, which tell us to go in a particular direction. When you then start having the conversation with the communities, it is difficult to come back from that. It would be very much more beneficial if the first thing we do is to talk to communities and have funds to support that, and then go and do the work once we have agreed parameters for scope. That is not how the system drives us currently.

Q151 **Mrs Murray:** Could we move on? The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management told us that shoreline management plans are not being fully implemented because they involve taking challenging and



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difficult decisions and there is not sufficient impetus or obligation to face up to some of those implications. Do you recognise that? I know that there was a specific instance where the South West Coast Path needed to be diverted between Looe and Polperro, going into Talland, I think, at one stage, and it was not received that well. That might be an example of one of these decisions that had to be taken.

Councillor Toms: You are quite correct, Sheryll. People did not like the fact that they had to move the coast path further back because it had dropped. That does not just equate to Looe to Polperro. It goes from Seaton to Looe. You probably do not know this place, but at Bodigga at one point the coastal path drops six feet. The path ran along that part. We have had to take it through the narrow lanes at the back of it, so it has an impact, not just in Looe but all along, up and down the coast.

Q152 **Chair:** Is anybody actually going out and telling people where the line is going to be? That is the issue for me. Nobody seems to exactly know what is happening. All sorts of speculation goes on.

Rachael Bice: There is a real challenge. The way the shoreline management plans have been designed is logical when you are doing a plan in its generality. You have sections of time in which you are going to hold the line, and then you are going to get managed realignments and it changes. At the moment, the thresholds are at a date, rather than an event. It would be much better if you agreed with the community at a point that there was an event after which you are going to change the policy.

In the 2014 storms, for example, we had policies that said we would not replace that, but because there was a drama around what had happened people arrived and said, "We will fix that". Things have been put back and created expectations of longevity around defence that probably never should have been made. In this whole situation with coastal defence, the making of unrealistic expectations is a real problem.

Q153 **Chair:** These plans have to be done in peacetime. They cannot be done in war. The problem is that, the moment everybody is flooded, it is very emotive, is it not, Sheryll? We have all had it and everybody wants it put back. That is why I am asking, "Is the plan coming?" Do you see the long-term plan?

Rachael Bice: We do not have a methodology backed up by the Environment Agency to put in these thresholds of change. That would be a really helpful change in the policy and the way it is implemented.

Q154 **Mrs Murray:** Rachael, maybe you could continue. Cornwall Council has had to concentrate your resources on one priority location, Mounts Bay. How big is the shortfall in investment versus the need for the rest of the county?

Rachael Bice: Blimey, for the rest of the county. For example, in Mounts Bay I think we are looking at a project cost of £130 million to £140



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million. We do not have anywhere near the amount of money for that from Government sources. I have this in front of me. The shortfall on funds is significant.

Q155 **Mrs Murray:** Maybe you could write to us.

Rachael Bice: We have developed a 25-year investment plan for Cornwall, which indicates the degree of shortfall funds we have. It is in percentage terms. The next round is something like an 85% gap. It is huge.

Q156 **Chair:** You must be the county in the country that has the most coastline anyway.

Rachael Bice: We are, yes, and it is the most complex. It is the amplification of rural and coastal together that means you only have 50% of the properties that you could have in a rural area, if you see what I mean. We can provide all the numbers on the gaps, but I will not go through all the papers now.

Q157 **Chair:** Also, where can the liaison between Government, Defra, the Environment Agency and you be improved? If we are going to fix this, we have to mix it all together.

Rachael Bice: There would be a real role for locally led investment plans and design of projects that were improved by the input of the central capacities in the Environment Agency. At the moment, it is slightly the other way round. It would also be important to look at the roles and responsibilities for different agencies and the legislation they are working to, which was made a long time ago in many cases. The Coast Protection Act 1949 did not have the social, economic or environmental challenges we are now facing. We are being asked to use tools that are somewhat out of date to help manage very complex issues.

Q158 **Mrs Murray:** Finally, Armand, I know you have answered this partly. From your experience, how do local people see shoreline management plans? How do they see the process? I know you have mentioned the coast paths dropping and things like that. Is there anything you want to add to that?

Councillor Toms: Rachael has just hit it on the head. Trying to get everybody to work together is a bit of a nightmare. We had a promise from the EEA, probably six or seven years ago, for some money to do things and capital funding, but we need to do all the pre-stuff first. If we do not have that money, we cannot move to the next stage where we get the money from the EEA, so it becomes an issue.

Q159 **Chair:** It goes round and round in circles.

Councillor Toms: In the end, we got some money to do the feasibility. That was fine. This is an example of how you can work together. In south-east Cornwall, we have one MP. We have—I do not know—18 different councillors from all political persuasions, independents,



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Conservatives, Labour, Liberal, all the lot, and yet when we wanted to improve the A38 we all worked together with the MP and moved it forward. We moved it forward quite substantially.

That is the important case. It proves that, no matter what your beliefs, your understandings or anything else are, if you sit there and work together you can achieve things. That is what we need to do with the Environment Agency, the council, the local towns and parishes, so that we move these things forward. That is the key: team. It is the team that will move things forward and win the goal, and not just saying, "I will do this bit. You do that bit". If somebody does not do their bit, it all falls down.

Chair: Yes, I know your MP is quite a useful MP. I will not say any more than that. I do not want to flatter her too much.

Mrs Murray: I wondered if I needed to declare another interest.

Q160 **Chair:** That is right. You make a really good point. We want to put in our report how we pull people together in order to make it work across the country. Otherwise, you will not solve it on your own, will you? I think that comes over.

We understand it has taken over 20 years to develop the Looe flood protection scheme. You have talked quite a bit about this, but how difficult has the process been and where have you managed to get to?

Councillor Toms: We have worked hard, together with Cornwall Council, with the group that has been mentioned before. We have produced this document. It gives you a brief overlay of what we want to achieve. It is a smaller scheme than you would probably expect, but it protects the town. It provides an impetus to business and it solves a few issues that are there. The East Looe River and the West Looe River go all the way up to St Cleer. In that area, all the catchment of the sewage works, the two tips that are there, Dean Quarry and Connon Bridge, leach out into those tributaries and end up in the river. Our bathing water quality has been suspect in the past. Therefore, that is an issue that we need to deal with. If we have bad bathing water, that is another negative for visitors. We have fought very hard, as a community, to rectify this, which is important for all of us.

Q161 **Chair:** What is the timescale for all this?

Councillor Toms: For this, if we had the money tomorrow we would be ready to go. We have the basic plans. We need to do the ecology stuff. It would be a couple of years at most to get all that done.

Q162 **Chair:** Does the money need to come from Government or the local authority? Can some of it come privately or not?

Councillor Toms: The LEP has put some money in. Cornwall Council has put a lot of money in. The harbour has put its own money in. The town



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council has put money into this. It is a combination of people who have put money in.

Q163 **Chair:** It is probably difficult to raise private funds.

Councillor Toms: At present, we have not looked at private funds.

Q164 **Chair:** We have talked a bit about some of the tax implications of companies putting money in.

Councillor Toms: Yes, and that was a great idea.

Q165 **Mrs Murray:** Has the Environment Agency made any commitment to funding?

Rachael Bice: For the Looe scheme, through the funding calculator, we can get just over £4 million, partially the revenue funding to set up the scheme and £3.7 million in capital. The total scheme cost is something like £41 million, so it is nowhere near the amount needed. With the magnitude of the funding gap, it is very difficult to see how we would put a funding package together from the known sources to progress the project. There is the major scheme, which unlocks all the economic benefits. Then there is a smaller temporary scheme, which we would then try to progress to ensure the town has protection.

That mirrors what we are doing in other areas, both down at Penzance and in Par and St Blazey, where we are still making quite significant investments to buy us 20 years, potentially, to have further discussions about how we are going to remodel the places and hopefully do master planning to enable that to happen. Again, master planning is a revenue-based activity, working with your communities, that the local authorities, with their squeezed resources, do not have so much of any more, and that is not what the Environment Agency funds.

The relationship between the different regulatory authorities is important. We are forced now into a situation where we would develop the plans for Looe, they would go into the planning system, and then Natural England would comment. It would be much better if there was capacity in the system for authorities to be involved from the beginning of these major schemes that are really important to communities, so that we do not end up, by the nature of the process, pitching community safety and prosperity against the environment. That is really counter-productive and wastes a lot of taxpayers' money in the backwards and forwards. A better process could be designed to address that.

Chair: That is a good point to make.

Q166 **Angela Smith:** Armand, you made what was for me quite an interesting point about the impacts on bathing water quality of the sewage works. You mentioned the quarry as well. I wondered, therefore, what the involvement of South West Water, for instance, and the quarry company was in the discussions. I can see that, with all the interventions you want



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to make around the harbour, with the tidal barrier and everything else, thinking about the impact of the sewage works on bathing water quality is really important, because you are changing river flows sometimes, so there is all that. I just wondered how all that thinking was incorporated into the scheme.

Councillor Toms: The trouble in Looe is that the sewage system was put in in about 1971. It was put in old style and the seals were not particularly good. It leaches the saline water into the system. That all has to be pumped up, treated and then let out, so it is a mammoth job. They have tried to seal. I think on the last scheme they spent £300,000 to seal these joints. They put in a thing and it resins the joint together.

Q167 **Chair:** I think the point Angela is making is on whether they are contributing to the overall scheme.

Councillor Toms: Not at the present time, but they are on the cards to contribute. We would see them as a partner in this because it would solve some of the issues that are there.

Rachael Bice: The thing there again is the difference, where South West Water would see its responsibilities around water quality. You would have to make quite a definite evidence base to say it is responsible for the issue, so it would not necessarily come to the table for a flood scheme unless that was of direct benefit and was in its long-term investment plans. This is where the different risk management authorities make their strategic plans in isolation in relation to the legislation and the regulations they are working under. There is not a duty on them to co-operate.

Q168 **Chair:** I would go back again to South West Water, because it has not had terribly good reports lately, has it? It may well want to up its game. Angela made the good point, along with Sheryll, that we could do with some support from them as well.

Rachael Bice: I completely agree. We are doing our best locally to bring that forward, but there are fractures in the system that make it difficult to partner as well as we would all like to.

Q169 **Angela Smith:** That is a really important point. Fractures in the system is how you describe it. It is similar to upland and moorland catchment restoration work, where the water companies in my area are working collaboratively with other partners to develop restorations. It is a similar principle. It seems to be easier in the uplands, to some extent, than your area.

Rachael Bice: To some degree, it is because it is more clearly drinking water supply.

Chair: That is an interesting point.

Rachael Bice: That is the combination.



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Q170 **Mrs Murray:** Very quickly, I know that South West Water has put considerable investment into Looe, into resolving the bathing water quality on the beach, over the last five or six years. Perhaps you would like to confirm, Armand. Am I correct?

Councillor Toms: It is probably a little bit longer than that, but it has. It did a scheme for £600,000 out at Hannafore to take the road water out of the system and stuff like that. It has invested.

Chair: It has an awful lot of beaches to contend with. We understand that. It is just that, in this new environment we are in, we are looking for a greater contribution from water companies. Much as I like South West Water, I would not like to let it off the hook on this particular occasion.

Mrs Murray: It would be wrong to think it had not invested, because it has.

Chair: It is on record that it has, but a little more might—

Mrs Murray: It has also improved the bathing water condition quite considerably.

Angela Smith: My point was about the integration of the company.

Chair: It is about how you work in the long run.

Angela Smith: I am not pointing any fingers.

Chair: Thank you for that clarification, Sheryll.

Q171 **Angela Smith:** Rachael, your submission calls for coastal adaptation and a managed realignment to be given a clearer mandate and recognition in national strategy. What difference would it make if we managed to move towards that position?

Rachael Bice: It would allow us in an area where we do not have a high volume of properties to start seriously looking at different solutions. It would also change the emphasis on the skills within the Environment Agency, from being primarily engineering with the environment work being done separately to that, so flood and coastal defences in one department and the environment in another. You would start to see that crossing over in a much greater way. The innovation that might result in cost savings, which possibly might be considerable.

It would probably mean we would need a different appraisal and assurance process for project outcomes, which is more agile rather than definite. On the one hand, the modelling and engineering approach gives us certainty. As we know, with some schemes they do not always result in the results we are expecting, but we create that certainty at the beginning. Managed realignment schemes are very much around making some change, seeing what happens, working with natural processes.

Q172 **Angela Smith:** So making space for water.



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Rachael Bice: Making space for water, absolutely. The mindset has to change, as well as the funding mechanisms to go with that.

Q173 **Angela Smith:** It sounds very similar to the kind of approach that we need to see on our rivers and water courses in many ways. Is that the same process?

Rachael Bice: It is very much the same process, yes.

Q174 **Angela Smith:** Do you think the Environment Agency is constrained in moving towards that approach by national policy or regulation? Does it wish to move towards that approach and is it prevented from doing so?

Rachael Bice: I am sure there are mixed views within the staff team. Locally, we do not find any in-principle barrier from colleagues in the Environment Agency. We are constrained by the rigidity of the process that is driven by the funding calculator mechanism, which effectively is dictated through Treasury.

Q175 **Angela Smith:** I see. We need to take the necessary shift in thinking on this to a very strategic macro level in order to get it right.

Rachael Bice: Yes, particularly the measure that funding is being asked to deliver, which is the protection of residential properties, which is the primary way you get money. You can get other bits of money for other things, but it is much less. We need to move to outcomes rather than outputs.

Q176 **Angela Smith:** The 25-year environment plan would be an interesting way of perhaps persuading Treasury to move on this. Do you think the environment plan in itself offers the promise of being able to perhaps deliver the changes you are looking for? Is coastal realignment and adaptation well represented in the plan?

Rachael Bice: It is mentioned, but I do not think it is a strong feature. I would need to go back to the plan to be sure about that. There is something about this particular issue of flooding and coastal defence being seen as slightly separate. Does it sit with the National Infrastructure Commission? Does it sit with Defra? Is it a planning issue? In fact, it is all of them, but it is not being looked at in concert. That would be one of the biggest things, from our experience of working on a number of different projects.

Our experience of trying to develop a number of different projects, including Looe, but also in Penzance and in Par and St Blazey, is that the myriad blocks you have to get is resource intensive and takes a deep understanding of the system to know how you can start to align them. That is difficult, particularly if you want communities to be more involved, as you reported earlier. It is the sort of thing that, unless you are really motivated, like Malcolm was earlier, you probably are not going to do if you have to do your own job and things. It is not the type of thing you can do in the evening, for communities.



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Q177 **Angela Smith:** We are making it much more difficult than we need to.

Rachael Bice: Potentially, but with good intent. I do not think any of it was developed deliberately. When we spot a problem in the system, we are not very good at being able to adjust it. That would be my experience.

Q178 **Angela Smith:** Michael Gove has talked today about local nature recovery networks and spatial planning in his latest statement on the environment Bill. Do you consider, Rachael, that that kind of thinking may help progress the removal of some of this knotty difficulty around what you are talking about?

Rachael Bice: Yes, absolutely. The nature recovery areas are really important. The climate change emergency declaration is an important point. How does that affect all the policy-making that is now going on? The local industrial strategies, for example, do not have that as one of the grand challenges? Should they, given that it has now been declared? It is thinking about adaptation in terms of community safety, as well as the ecological benefits, but the carbon storage from adaptation is also important. Concrete defences have a massive carbon impact. This thinking has multiple benefits associated with it, but it is not what all our 20th-century skills, industries and businesses have been set up on the back of to deliver. In the construction industry, the thinking about groundwork—

Q179 **Chair:** It is a partly a changing mindset, is it not?

Rachael Bice: Yes.

Angela Smith: Yes, natural carbon storage is an obvious thing for us to do.

Chair: That is right.

Rachael Bice: We are not set up well enough yet. Even the money that has gone into research has not backed up, so we do not have the same level of data on these issues compared with the engineering solutions. How do we move to see these as legitimate solutions for the future and start to put in all the resources needed to make good decisions in that space? That is that point you asked about what difference it would make if there was a real commitment for this. It is all the different decisions that back that up that give us some really good outcomes.

Q180 **Angela Smith:** It seems to me as well that NGOs are very good at advancing this kind of argument. They are very well developed in relation to the upland areas. There is perhaps a need for more of that kind of pressure in relation to the coastal environment.

Rachael Bice: Definitely, and particularly in Cornwall, where our coastal environment is slightly different from that in other areas of England. We have these short, rapid catchments where upstream interventions of natural flood management do not work as well because they are so rapid



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and flashy. That means the planning decisions become much more important. You really do not want to build in particular areas. Our heritage colleagues told us recently that in Boscastle—you may remember there were floods there in 2004—prior to 1850, many of the buildings were designed in a way that water would flow through them. After 1850, they started to be built across where the flood water would flow. When there was a big flood, that blocked up water and made the flood much worse. There are things we can look back to in history that help us understand how we work with these processes.

Q181 **Angela Smith:** That is interesting. That is fascinating.

Rachael Bice: It is thinking from the ground up again, rather than from culture down.

Angela Smith: Literally.

Rachael Bice: Quite literally, yes.

Q182 **Mrs Murray:** How important is it that funding arrangements are equitable between areas in need of support, despite their relative wealth? Do the current arrangements ensure that a joined-up approach is taken, as far as coastal management is concerned?

Rachael Bice: It is incredibly important that it is equitable. One of the features of austerity has been an approach that says, “Work with the willing locally”, and working with the willing often means the communities with most social capital, which to some degree often means most wealth. That is good for those communities, and they can advance things, but it means that some other communities are left behind. That is where the local authority should step in, but because they want to advance something, they will work with the willing. There is a real challenge in that.

As Armand was describing, the willingness in some communities to put their own money forward for feasibility advances things. If the communities do not have either the people or the money available to do that, they always stay a step back in the process from being able even to come to the local authority and say, “We would like £2.3 million for further feasibility studies please”. Potentially reinstating the Environment Agency’s capacity to fund strategies routinely across communities that are at risk is really important.

Councillor Toms: I am going to go back to Joseph Thomas in the 1800s. He was an engineer and he built the groyne where the pier is now with stone and oak wedges, and it is still there today. It silted up at the mouth of the harbour, so he, at his own expense, built the round at the end. That is why they call it the banjo pier now. He would only get paid if it actually worked, and he got paid. Those are the engineering skills we need today, from people who are willing to try.

Q183 **Chair:** Did he get paid before he died?



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Councillor Toms: Yes, he did. It was £2,000 from what I can remember.

Chair: That was quite a lot of money in those days.

Councillor Toms: Yes, it was a lot of money, but it worked. Joseph Thomas taught us a lot of things: you have to have a will to make a solution for a problem, no matter what it is; if you believe in it that much, you should put your own money in. That is what the community of Looe has done. It has put the money in. The thing is that it is not just Looe; it is Polperro and Mevagissey; it is all the other coastal communities. We are blessed in Looe, because we have some really good people who work very hard, but when you have a problem you need to have the project outline and the team that come together. That team needs to be everybody. Even if it is only putting in £500, it makes that much difference.

Q184 **Chair:** It gives them ownership too.

Councillor Toms: It gives them ownership. The Environment Agency, Government, local government and town and parish councils can make a small difference by putting just that small amount of money in. It all helps. That is my parting gift to you. The solution, from us and from the last team, is that, instead of trying to work apart, we should work together.

Chair: That is coming over loud and clear.

Q185 **Angela Smith:** You talked earlier, Rachael, about managed realignment and the focus on protecting homes in current policy. How could grant in aid or partnership funding be changed to better support the kinds of adaptations you are talking about and managed realignment? The second part of the question is a bit separate but, nevertheless, does the current formula fully capture the impact of flooding on businesses and cultural and social assets? That is related to my point about caravan parks on clifftops earlier.

Rachael Bice: In answer to your second question first, no, it does not. For example, in Looe, if we were able to count properties that are above commercial properties, 150 extra properties would be able to qualify for flood defence grant in aid, but because of the rules we cannot get those. It is five pence in the pound of benefit for commercial properties rather than residential, which I think is about 45 pence. There is a big differential in the amount of money available for commercial properties. In our fishing villages, such as Looe, there are more commercial properties than there are residential, but it is the heart of the community and the economy that supports everything else around it. Where the flooding occurs is not necessarily where all the benefits are sat. Recognising where the flooding occurs and what benefits that whole place delivers would be important.

On the point about how we could adapt the funding, the alignment across different departments, in terms of planning, industrial policy, energy



policy, all that type of thing, needs to start to come together, particularly in light of climate change. We need revenue as well as capital funds. We need different mechanisms of assessment that account for good engineering but also good ecological and natural processes. That point about being locally designed and then centrally enhanced would be great. There needs to be recognition that infrastructure and livelihoods are as important to the economy as homes, if not sometimes more so. Thinking about transport links in the south-west is particularly relevant around the coast.

As was mentioned briefly earlier, you need to have honest conversations with communities. Sometimes they are not going to be sustainable in the long term. That is not popular. Without some type of alternative to put the energy into, it is very risky to have those honest conversations, because there is nowhere for it to go and it is immediate property blight. Fairbourne in Wales is a good example of what has happened there. Having moneys for relocations, redevelopment, moving communities, but with their co-design and buy-in over long periods of time, is important. Again, that works outside of political timescales, so long-term plans are very important.

Q186 Angela Smith: This is my last question. There is a rumour going around that there will be a big devolution announcement, with further devolution of power. Is this the kind of change in funding arrangement that could perhaps be best delivered by devolution? Devolution in Cornwall, in terms of what is needed, is very different from what would be needed in South Yorkshire, for instance, which is completely and disappointingly inland.

Rachael Bice: We have had discussions around that locally, because obviously we had an early devolution deal and some further asks. From a proactive point of view, we think it would be really beneficial. The risk for us would be if you have had your money and a large flood comes along.

Chair: It is the funding, yes.

Rachael Bice: Then we are left holding the baby. It is a trust relationship with Government.

Q187 Chair: Resources have to come with devolution. That is what you are saying.

Rachael Bice: They do, but there is also the difference between allocated expected resources and responsive resources if events occur that are much bigger than anybody could have anticipated. The local authority could be bankrupted by a big flood event. We have contingency funds for things on the scale we are expecting, but, as we are seeing, things are starting to come at a scale we are not expecting. How we deal with that is very important. There is a lot of will to take on responsibility, be locally led, locally creative and community involved. There are lots of positives on that, but it needs to be done with all our eyes open and not just passing responsibility. It still has to be shared.



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Q188 **Chair:** Thank you for a very good evidence session. I think the Government will always be the insurer of last resort, even though they never want to be, because politically it is very difficult not to be.

Councillor Toms: I would just like to thank Mr French. He phoned me at 8.30 last night to make sure I had got a message.

Q189 **Chair:** He is very flattered by such comments. I appreciate all of you coming up. Like I said, it has been a good evidence session from both panels and it will help us to put together what will hopefully be a good report. It came over loud and clear this afternoon that we all have to work together to deliver it, so we very much appreciate your experiences on the ground.

Rachael Bice: As a last comment, I have that figure that you wanted that I did not have. There is an 85% funding gap for the shoreline management plan implementation.

Chair: That is a big gap.

Rachael Bice: It is massive.

Chair: We will work on that. Perhaps we can incorporate it in our report and put a bit more pressure on Government to deliver. Thank you.