



Protecting the past, shaping the future

Press release from
Suffolk Preservation Society
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Pledge welcomed – but more must still be done

A leading campaign group has welcomed a government pledge to protect as much of Suffolk's unique coastline as possible – but warned that local communities must be given a much larger say in future plans to save land essential to the county's economy.

Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS) yesterday gave the promises made by Lord Smith, chairman of the Environment Agency, a cautious welcome following his visit to the region on Tuesday.

But the society also said local communities were being given too little say in vital flood and erosion management plans which will have a huge effect on the future of Suffolk's estuaries, coastline and important agricultural land.

SPS feels a consultation currently being carried out by Defra on managing future risk to the county's coast fails to give ownership to local people and cannot therefore ever hope to win their backing.

The society also said Defra did not appear to have an overall policy in place for managing the county's coastlines and estuaries – which could ultimately lead to the loss of vast areas of valuable land and affect the region's economy.

"Suffolk has both a coastline and estuaries of great beauty and importance but which are likely to suffer adversely from flooding, the impacts of climate change, and from managed retreat," said Richard Ward, society director.

"We welcome Lord Smith's pledge to protect as much of the coastline as possible and truly hope his promise to work closely with local communities to find a long-term solution is genuine. We believe local people should be at the heart of such decisions as the in depth knowledge which they have can often bring so much more to a proposal than any sophisticated risk management assessment."

In its response to Defra's consultation, the society also asked that compensation rules should be reviewed so that landowners can be properly repaid should they lose their home or valuable farmland.

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“We would ask Defra to give people the same amount of care, attention and compensation as is afforded to wildlife,” added Mr Ward.

“It is hugely inconsistent to find alternative sites for displaced wildlife under a managed retreat scheme and not for people. How on earth can this be justified?”

“It also seems that insufficient thought or consideration has been given to the potential loss of important agricultural land, which is essential to the country’s economy, food production and sustainable living agenda. Coastal erosion and the loss of land inevitably means our ability to become self sufficient in terms of food production is also eroded – with obvious and serious consequences.

“That is why it is vitally important that the government gets this strategy right now, before it’s too late and much of our cherished coastline is lost forever.

Ends

Note to editors: SPS, founded in 1929, originally worked to protect the county’s buildings and landscape. Today, the society has broadened its focus to help shape Suffolk’s future, largely campaigning for sensitive and appropriate development, more and better quality affordable homes and to ensure sustainable infrastructures are in place to support the county’s communities.

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