

four 'Inform → Collaborate'

Kilnsea, East Riding of Yorkshire

In August 2005, the Environment Agency published the 'Humber Flood Risk Management Strategy'¹⁵ consultation document. Easington Parish Council (of which Kilnsea is a part) and the local community of Kilnsea read in this document that:

"... the coastal defences near Kilnsea are being threatened by erosion, and could be breached within five to ten years, but possibly in as little as two years. There is no economic justification for realigning or replacing these defences so they are likely to be abandoned."

The decision was based on a cost-benefit analysis calculation required by Defra for the Environment Agency to fund flood defences and Kilnsea's isolated, rural nature.

The publication was the first time the community had learned about being 'abandoned' and they were naturally upset that they had not been informed before receiving the document. The Environment Agency had sent copies of the document to East Riding of Yorkshire Council, for distribution to all parish councils before residents received their copy, but unfortunately this had not happened in Easington.

To make amends, the Environment Agency held a public drop-in session at Kilnsea. The whole of the village arranged to meet at the crossroads in Kilnsea to enter the session together. Although a little daunting for the project staff, this actually helped as they were able to address the whole village at the same time. It also helped to strengthen the sense of community spirit amongst the people of Kilnsea.

This initial confrontation was unnecessary as the community were well aware of the fragility of their coast and were not surprised by the Environment Agency decision. Standard calculations about future defences are based on 100 year timescales, which was not appropriate in Kilnsea's case. Discussion with the community agreed that a 30 year timescale would be more appropriate and this was used to recalculate the cost-benefit ratio. This showed that work should be carried out but that as Kilnsea was so low down in the list of national priorities, funds would need to be secured from elsewhere to ensure the work was completed before irreversible damage was done.

'The Kilnsea and Spurn Flood Defence Group' was established, and communications and relationships between this group and all key partners developed and strengthened. Supported by the Coastal Futures project, £200,000 was secured by the group, including contributions from the Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee, from East Riding of Yorkshire Council Highways Department and from two other pots of funding.

The success of this project was due to the positive, 'can do' attitude of both the Environment Agency project manager and of the community who chose to focus on what could be done, rather than on what could not. The new defences were completed in autumn 2006 and have bought the community time to plan for their futures.

¹⁵ www.environment-agency.gov.uk/humberstrategy

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

ALL SUGGESTIONS IN EARLIER CASE STUDIES APPLY, WITH THE ADDITION OF:

Professional Responsibility	Local Community Responsibility
<p>1 No matter how rural or isolated, face to face communication is vital to establish and develop relationships</p>	<p>1 Be reasonable in expectations of project staff. Don't compromise their safety by demanding meetings on late evenings in isolated locations in mid-winter</p>
<p>2 Go the 'extra mile' to look for solutions. It may take time but it pays back in the end</p>	<p>2 Never underestimate the power of a cup of tea! This is a genuine 'ice-breaker' as project staff may have travelled a long distance to meet at short notice</p>
<p>3 Consider the resources needed for communications as part of project planning and work closely with communications staff to ensure language in public documents is not confrontational, vague or misleading</p>	<p>3 Suggest meeting places where you feel most comfortable</p>



▲ Kilnsea and Spurn Point

Courtesy of the Environment Agency