

# two 'Consult'

Skeffling, East Riding of Yorkshire

*"... a more educated and demanding public is no longer willing to sit on the sidelines watching passively while the big decisions affecting their lives are made by politicians, experts and officials."* (Geoff Mulgan, Involve Chair)<sup>10</sup>

Skeffling is a rural farming community with very few houses. The national criteria scoring (produced by Defra for use by the Environment Agency) for continuing to fund the maintenance of flood defences here is therefore weak. The logical decision would be to withdraw maintenance of the current flood defences, resulting in their failure in approximately 10–20 years time.

However, due to the European Union Habitats Directive (1992) stating that any inter-tidal habitat lost due to human activity (e.g. by creating static structures like sea defences) must be compensated for, the Humber Strategy suggests the creation of 149 hectares of inter-tidal habitat through managed realignment<sup>11</sup> at Skeffling. This would create a brand new flood bank inland where national funding would not otherwise allow.

The local villages affected by the proposal are farming communities reluctant to lose 149 hectares of prime agricultural land reclaimed for farming from the estuary in living memory, losing income, heritage and tradition as a result. It is an emotive issue.

The Environment Agency published the suggestion of a managed realignment site at Skeffling in its original 'Humber Flood Risk Management Strategy' consultation document (HFRMS) in August 2005, stating that works would be in the "... 10 to 15 years from now" timescale and that managed realignment was the preferred option in this location. The document went out for public consultation in August 2005 and this was the first time the

local community had heard of such plans so publicly. This was the target area for the Coastal Futures Humber Community Project. Local information sessions for the communities affected by the Skeffling proposal were held and the variety of options described under project delivery (see page 6) were implemented.

The final document, 'Planning for the Rising Tides: The Humber Flood Risk Management Strategy' was published in March 2008. The completion date for the Skeffling project is listed as... "likely completion date between 2010 and 2020" in this document. In this final version the option of maintenance withdrawal is also given equal emphasis, which came as a shock to locals who had just come to terms with the idea of managed realignment.

*"They're not totally honest with you in my opinion, they should be more honest with what they're doing, and then they would get a bit more support from the local people."* (Resident – parish councillor)<sup>12</sup>

Despite all the project input, there is still hope in the community that existing defences will continue to be maintained, supported by the NFU and the local MP using the argument that in a time of world food shortages, grade one agricultural land should be protected.

<sup>10</sup> 'People & Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision making' – Involve, 2005

<sup>11</sup> [www.coastalfutures.org.uk/solution.html](http://www.coastalfutures.org.uk/solution.html) – for animation of how managed realignment works

<sup>12</sup> Coastal Futures Humber Community Project, Qualitative Market Research feedback – January 2006

## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

ALL OF THE SUGGESTIONS IN CASE STUDY 1 ALSO APPLY TO CASE STUDY 2, WITH THE ADDITION OF:

Professional Responsibility	Local Community Responsibility
<p>1 Be open and honest from the beginning, even if this means initial confrontation. Better to deal with all issues from the start rather than as 'surprises' later – these just create a lack of trust and respect</p>	<p>1 Recognise and accept that there are some things that cannot be changed – such as legislation, policies and procedures. Rather than waste energy arguing these points, better to work amicably with the project staff to find the best solution for all parties concerned</p>
<p>2 Set very clear boundaries during consultation about exactly what people have the opportunity to change or inform, as well as what they don't</p>	<p>2 Visit existing similar sites and make appointments to see key people involved in them. Gain as much information as possible about what procedures took place and how partners all worked together (including the local community)</p>
<p>3 Involve local knowledge. Local people know their land, drainage and tide information better than anyone</p>	<p>3 Recognise the efforts made by professionals to build relationships with the community. Make an effort and meet them half way for the benefit of all concerned</p>
<p>4 Consider when the suit, laptop and PowerPoint presentation are necessary at community meetings, and when they create barriers</p>	<p>4 Information provided must be shared factually and correctly with others so that every member of the community has the opportunity to form his/her own opinion</p>
<p>5 It is your responsibility to make the relationship with communities work. Staying one step ahead and aiming to exceed community expectations are some of the best ways to succeed</p>	<p>5 Professionals are more likely to work with you to try to find a solution within the project boundaries if the relationship is constructive and positive</p>
<p>6 Understand and accept that these issues are emotive for the local community – just stating the obvious about the benefits of a technical scheme does not always help</p>	<p>6 Try not to make this a personal issue. It is hard to not be emotional and easy to take out frustrations and anger on individuals, but communities gain nothing by alienating a potential ally</p>



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▲ The local community is arguing that grade one agricultural land should be protected.