Involving the community in a changing coastline: an English case study

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Effective engagement: a common challenge

Waterfront engagement often involves:

- history of protection and development
- climate change pressures
- lack of appropriate skills and experience
- political involvement
- technical meets the emotional

Learning as we go...
Case study: Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy

- partnership with local councils
- review of coastal management practices every 10 years
- address flood and erosion risks to 5,300 properties, infrastructure, business + farmland in area
- management proposals over 100-year timescale
- highlight funding realities
Learning from the southern coast of England

Pagham to East Head strategy area...
Strategy must address a changing coastline

- existing defences at low standard of protection
- limited funding
- no justification for maintaining over 100 years
- sea level rise, increased storminess + subsidence
- flood/erosion risks to properties + critical infrastructure

= proposals call for adaptive approach including managed realignment at Medmerry
Case study: Medmerry, West Sussex

Strategy proposed England's first managed realignment on open coast
Coastal Defence Strategy initial consultation

90-day consultation (Nov 2006 – Feb 2007)
- project team included engineers from local councils
- comments invited from 20,000 permanent residents + seasonal visitors
- consultation document with 'preferred options'
- exhibitions + feedback form
- media work and website

Met legal requirement but was poorly received.
Initial consultation: started well but quickly turned contentious

Community rejected proposals

- angry residents / businesses
- demand more time = extended consultation period
- new pressure group + public meetings
- doubt our evidence, e.g. economics
- perception of ‘birds over people’
- lack of political support from planning authority

'Fight them on the beaches!!!
Project team took stock: what went wrong?

- no real objectives meant inability to evaluate progress
- draft proposals with no warm-up engagement
- perceived lack of empathy + 'us v. them' mentality
- engineers not elected officials
- neglected local knowledge
- shied away from community resistance

Lack of support resulted in a lame duck strategy.
If at first you don't succeed...

New approach with a revised engagement plan:

✓ measurable objectives: why do we? why do they?
✓ stakeholder analysis: inclusive and transparent
✓ ‘what it means for you’: plain English and relevant
✓ tailored activities + clear responsibilities
✓ establish common ground with pressure group: we all want communities safe from flooding / erosion
✓ ongoing relationships: not just for 90 days
✓ build and demonstrate trust
Second round: draft strategy consultation (Summer 2008)

- consultation document clarifying areas of influence, restrictions
- series of exhibitions and workshops
- 1:1 meetings
- mailers + seasonal engagement
- Council presentations
Draft strategy consultation risk areas
(from UK Environment Agency's consultation document)
Tailored engagement at Medmerry

- first managed realignment of its kind
- technically challenging + strong opinions
- opportunity to turn pressure group into collaborative working or liaison group:
  - clarity on when/what could be influenced
  - involved decision-makers + influencers
  - facilitated to avoid 'us v. them' dynamic
  - collaborative agenda design, work plan + timetable
  - transparency through shared communications
The Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group (MStAG)

- project team proposed liaison group – could not decide in isolation
- initial large meeting with many groups to identify community representatives
- facilitation support
- collaborative terms of reference + membership

All agreed: a community working group must be driven by the community!
Positive response to second consultation

- 1,000 people attended exhibitions + workshops
- Discussion of future changes to coastline
- Newsletter mailer summarizing feedback, next steps
- Ongoing dialogue with MStAG
Revised engagement turned things around

It was... 'fight on the beaches'
• thousands of complaints, No.10 petition, public meetings, Council opposition

It became... overwhelming community support
✓ understanding and acceptance, unanimous Councillor support, and zero complaints

'Everyone is now working together, and the Environment Agency is no longer seen as an enemy.'

– Cllr Connor, Chichester District Council
Results: a strategy that could be delivered

✓ General community support for strategy.

✓ Local planning authority supportive of schemes.

✓ Improved relationships with community groups.

✓ Agreed ways of working for future.

✓ Community involved in coastal adaptation.
Next steps: ongoing engagement during Medmerry scheme delivery

- challenge traditional scheme approach + seek community involvement
- old objectives and outcomes no longer apply
- focus on transparency + share plan with community
- clarity on level of influence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What stakeholders could influence</th>
<th>What stakeholders could not influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location and design of banks (within technical constraints)</td>
<td>Strategic recommendation for managed realignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency access through the site, footpath routes and other recreational enhancements</td>
<td>Timing for the design, planning and construction process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction access routes and use of site before and during construction</td>
<td>Location of the breach in the shingle bank and whether this is allowed to occur naturally or man-made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning decisions</td>
<td>The standard of protection that the new banks will provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding from other sources for recreational and habitat enhancements</td>
<td>Coastal processes, currents and geology impacting on the design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions about drainage</td>
<td>Total flood risk management budget available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1: Table of influence derived from the Medmerry summary stakeholder engagement plan (Environment Agency, 2010)
MStAG engagement continued

Regular meetings during scheme design

➢ engagement alongside tight timetable
➢ ensure design reflects local knowledge, e.g. drainage
➢ seek opportunities for community enhancements, earlier rather than later
➢ partnership approach to streamline implementation
➢ co-host public exhibitions + online updates
➢ support community initiatives, e.g. green tourism
Local input regarding scheme design
MStAG collaboration = results

✓ Final scheme design reflected local knowledge + concerns.

✓ Achieved community understanding and support.

✓ Provided evidence for local planning authority.

✓ Likely objections identified and addressed.

✓ Effective working relationships for the future.
Medmerry: what's happening now?

- received planning approval, construction underway
- continue to work with MStAG during construction + breach
- regular meetings / newsletters to discuss progress
- seek to incorporate community recreational and habitat aspirations into scheme implementation wherever possible

More information available online:
www.environment-agency.gov.uk
Learning as we go...
Lessons learned from initial consultation through scheme design

- We should have involved communities from the start of the strategy review process.
- Our technical timetable needed to be integrated with our engagement plan.
- In the beginning the project team lacked the necessary expertise, time and resources for true engagement.
- Throughout the process we needed to be clear and open about what was / wasn’t up for influence.
- We sometimes failed to value relationships and local knowledge.
- Evaluation was only possible when we had honest and measurable objectives.
Levels of participation
(from UK Environment Agency's Working with Others toolkit)

Least influence / control over decision

Inform: provide information / announce a decision

Gather information: understand people's views, request feedback, includes formal consultation

Involve: dialogue on issues with opportunity for real influence, final decision remains with organizing body

Share decision making: people work as partners sharing discussion, negotiation, and final decision

Greatest influence / control over decision

Greatest number of people

Least number of people
A few helpful rules to make your next engagement exercise effective

- Early engagement is essential.

- Be inclusive and adopt a cross-sector approach.

- Engagement must be meaningful for those involved.

- Communicate clearly and honestly.

- Ask how others want to be engaged and plan for change.

- There is always something to influence.
Thank you.

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