

On the south coast of England residents of a low-lying peninsula are working with local and national authorities in a ground-breaking fashion to forge a sustainable future in which the risk of climate change is being met with optimism – not fear. Members of the Manhood Peninsula Partnership explain.

Embracing climate change

The Manhood Peninsula Partnership, whose members include local councils, the Environment Agency, English Nature and local community representatives (see box for full membership), was formed nearly a decade ago. It led to the Manhood Peninsula being chosen as a leading case study in a multi-million pound European planning and climate change project and now being selected by DEFRA as a pilot study for Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

Locally the MPP has supported small-scale sustainable projects working with schools and local groups as well as encouraging cycle-ways, environmental tourism and a renewed optimism about an area which faces the full force of sea-level rise and the impact of increasing storminess and intense rainfall.

It all began in 1997 when two local mums, risk management journalist

Carolyn Cobbold and Dutch spatial planner Renee Santema, walked into the district council asking how the council planned to deal with its water management problems in the future. Finding the answers lacking, they then approached the Environment Agency and became even more concerned. Realising that government funding for coastal defence in the area was likely

to become increasingly difficult to secure in the future, they questioned whether it was morally or practically viable for local authorities to continue developing the area without a strategic rethink of its future.

Gathering residents together in local village halls, the two ladies realised that their concerns were shared. They then had a brainwave. Why not bring together a group of international experts to help local residents and their local authorities determine the problems and identify options for managing them? Renee contacted NIROV, the Dutch planning institute of which she was a member, and suggested that they held their annual brain-storming workshop overseas – on the Manhood Peninsula. Here was a small compact area of England facing sea defence and inland flooding issues, infrastructure headaches and increasingly onerous housing targets, problems the Netherlands have faced for

centuries. It was an offer NIROV found intriguing and promised to find 20 Dutch experts on water management and planning who were prepared to come and work for five days in England for free, if Renee could organise accommodation and travel.

After months of persuasion, Renee and Carolyn secured sufficient funding, thanks to the support of West Sussex County Council, the EA, Chichester District Council and other local organisations and businesses. The resulting five day workshop with Dutch and British experts, working from briefs put forward by local people and local authorities, put the Manhood Peninsula and its problems on the map and formed the impetus needed for everyone locally to work together on a strategic and long-term plan for the area.

'Going Dutch' produced several 'blue-sky' options for the area but more importantly stressed that whatever options the area adopted

for the future they needed to be integrated, long-term, sustainable and work for the local community. The 2001 workshop also urged local authorities, residents and businesses to work together. Thus the MPP was formed.

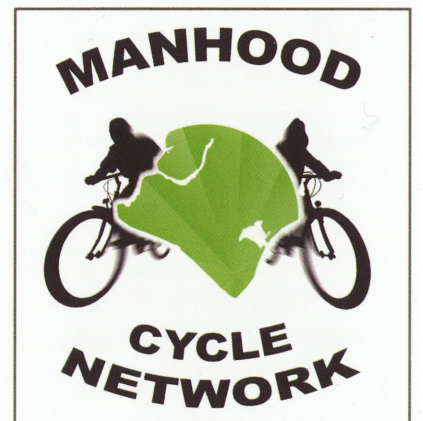
Since then the Environment Agency and Chichester District Council have been informed that government funding for coastal defence works in the area will indeed become harder to obtain. A semi-rural area such as the Manhood lies way down the list of national priority spending for coastal defence. As a result, the EA and CDC are proposing a radical realignment of the rural coastline between the peninsula's two main coastal settlements of Selsey and Bracklesham/East Wittering.

Fortunately, the MPP had been established with a working rapport already developed between the local authorities and local community. The Dutch, keen to revisit the area, freely returned in 2008 for another workshop and, together with the local community, questioned and tested the viability of the EA/CDC scheme and searched again for alternative options.

The EA and CDC now are pursuing the Medmerry Realignment and the MPP is a vital component in helping ensure that future coastal management will maintain the security of the area as well as benefit residents and businesses. The realignment will be the first such scheme on an open coast line in the UK and will be watched carefully by other coastal communities. It is crucial that the scheme is technically sound and that the local community is not disadvantaged.

By breaking the shingle bank that protects this stretch of the peninsula, the EA will create replacement coastal habitat for Southampton's port development further along the coast. This is required by the European Union, providing a compensation mechanism for local farmers, whose land will slowly become salinated.

Meanwhile, the MPP is working to ensure that the new habitat will benefit local communities both environmentally and economically. Ideas to provide recreational and tourist amenities such as bridle ways, cycle ways and footpaths are being considered by local residents,



authorities and groups such as the Manhood Cycle Network and Manhood Bridleways Association. Resident homes are being safeguarded and a hold-the-line coastal defence strategy is being implemented for the built-up settlements on the coast. The MPP is also working to ensure that drainage of the entire peninsula is not compromised by the new coastal realignment with reserve space for water built in to the EA's scheme and local development plan.

A recent bid by Chichester District Council to DEFRA's coastal change grant scheme has secured funding to help kick-start coastal projects and regeneration plans for Selsey. This will include supporting a local residents' action group who are keen to investigate whether a community owned coastal trust could be a viable option. Funds will also allow for the MPP to develop Integrated Coastal Zone Management for the area. The national independent charity Coastnet will also work with the local community and local authorities to demystify the technical language and myriad of complex legislation relating to coastal management with the aim of creating a mutual understanding of the risks and opportunities for the area. A grant to help assess the current and future impact of tourism to the coastal area is also included.

Local residents and local authorities are beginning to believe that a sustainable future for the area is possible and, indeed, preferable to the ostrich-like strategy of continuing without recognising its problems. This is an area where the global threat of climate change really has been embraced at a local level and treated as an opportunity to work together for a sustainable future. ■

The Manhood Peninsula Partnership steering group meets four times a year. In addition to local residents, it is made up of representatives from the following organisations:

- Chichester District Council (MPP Secretariat)
- West Sussex County Council
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Chichester Harbour Conservancy
- Sussex Association of Local Councils
- Selsey Town Council
- Peninsula Community Forum
- National Trust
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds