

ESCALATE: summary of headline results from the Norfolk case study

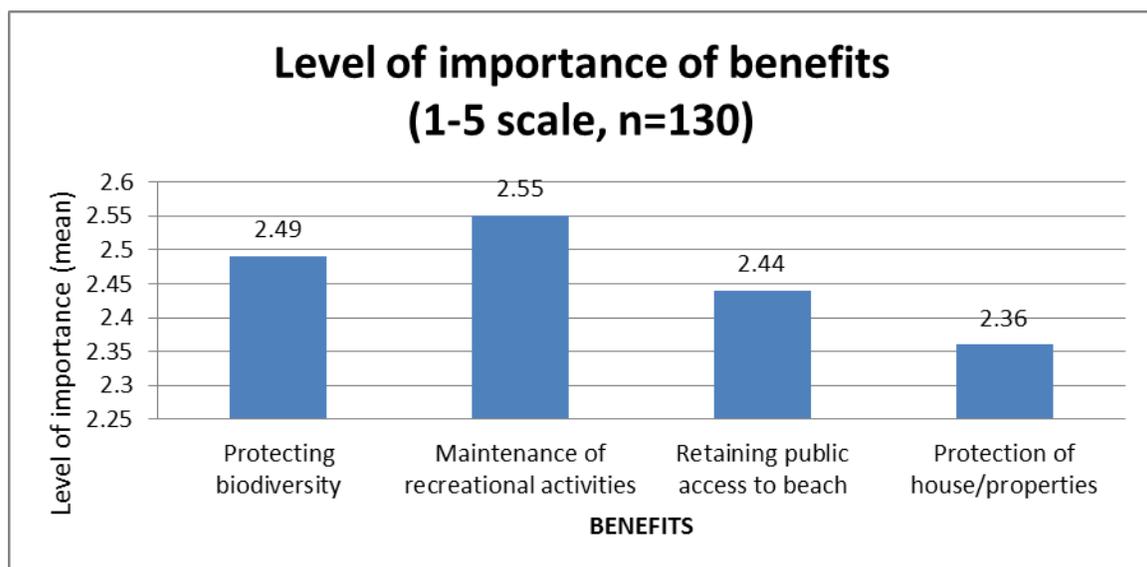
In the north Norfolk study area, the proposed strategy for coastal management is to maintain and improve existing defences in some areas, and allow 'space for water' in others. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed to a random sample of 1000 households in coastal areas in order to investigate the project's main research aims. The response rate for the survey was approximately 13%, resulting to 130 completed questionnaires.

Perceptions on coastal management

Almost half of the sample declared themselves well informed about coastal management issues (51.5%), with 32.1% mentioning that this information was largely or wholly derived from contact with the Environment Agency. Furthermore, 32.1% of the sample noted that they were sufficiently informed on coastal issues from their Local Authority and/or from government organizations.

Almost half of the sample were aware of the local Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) (44.1%). However, the majority of respondents who so replied (85.3%) commented that the current SMP would not, in their opinion, protect them from flooding and coastal erosion in future. Regarding the anticipated benefits of implementing the current SMP, respondents' perceptions were close to the average of the 5 point likert scale (mean scores between 2.36-2.55, Graph 1). Specifically, the most important benefit connected with the Plan was the maintenance of recreational activities and the protection of biodiversity (Figure 1). The least important benefit was felt to be the protection of properties. A significant minority of respondents did not comment on these issues, due to the marked lack of awareness across north Norfolk coastal communities of the SMP's purpose and content.

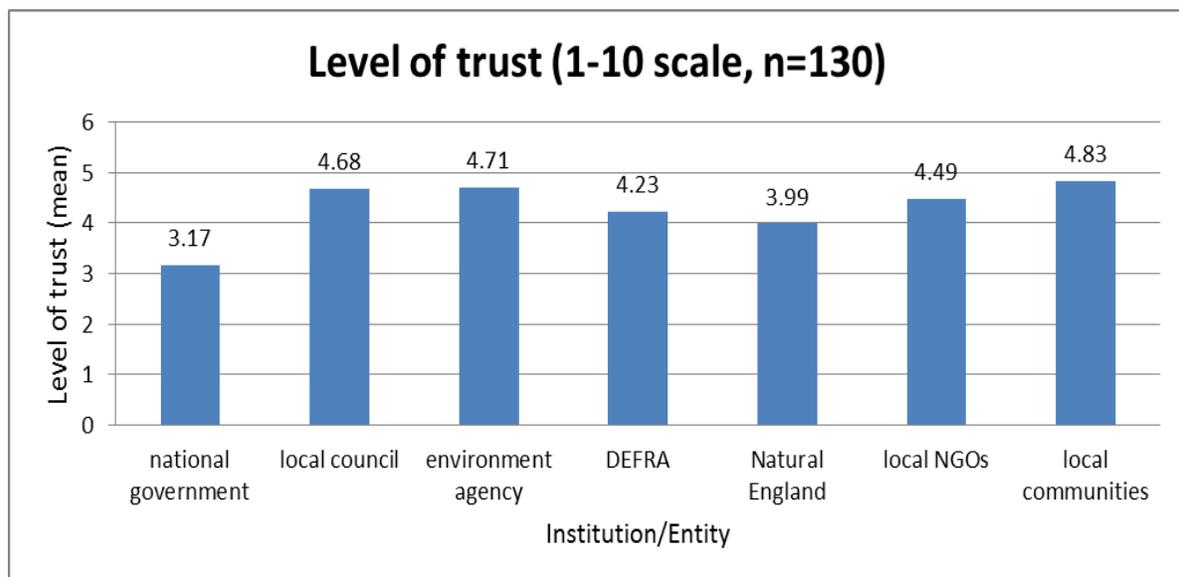
Graph 1. Evaluation of the benefits of the SMP (measured on a 5 point scale)



Social capital measurement

The highest level of trust for coastal management issues was evidenced by local communities managing coastal issues on their own with Environment Agency assistance, followed by coastal management coordinated through District Councils. However, this still remained below the average score of the Likert scale. The lowest levels of trust vested by respondents for managing coastal issues was towards national Government (Graph 2).

Graph 2. Level of trust for managing the coast (measured on a 10 point scale)



A relatively high level of trust and collaboration across and within communities was evident in the area. 74.1% of the sample claimed that their neighbours would help them if their home was endangered by flooding or coastal erosion, and this percentage rose with respect to likely help from family and friends (83%). Regarding social networking in the area, 83% of the sample declared that they were not members in NGOs, and 87.5% that they did not participate in any voluntary/third sector groups. Lastly, while 45.5% declared that they would be willing to participate in a consultation process for coastal management in north Norfolk, only 5.4% had already participated in local coastal defence action groups.

Conclusions

National policymakers in Defra and the Environment Agency expect the current Shoreline Management Plan for north Norfolk to be the most sustainable management solution in the long-term. However, project results show only low levels of public

awareness of the current SMP. For those who were aware of it, the most important source of information was the Environment Agency. Furthermore, despite the fact that approximately half of the sample was willing to participate in coastal related activities, a very low percentage was actually a member of a local coastal management group. A significant weakness would seem to be the lack of engagement between central government organizations and local communities, and a marked lack of networking which might facilitate the flow of information and opinion on coastal issues both ways. Study findings also revealed relatively high levels of trust in the capacity of local residents and communities to manage coastal issues on their own, and in the reliability and effectiveness of the Environment Agency's work locally. Trust towards Government organizations, in particular Defra, was significantly lower. These results reveal the significant loss of trust in the current national coastal management framework, and the perceived lack of responsiveness by central Government to local needs. This issue is important taking into consideration that in future climate change impacts in the area are projected to intensify, especially as coastal defences in parts of the case study area are not to be maintained. This is already causing significant distress to some local residents, exacerbated by the seeming injustice of defences being maintained in neighbouring villages. In order to confront future policy challenges, it is essential to give the local community a voice to express their needs and find sustainable solutions which will give emphasis on the socio-economic impacts of the management of the coast. Again, this underscores the need for widespread public participation in policy decision-making on coastal management strategy.