

Report calls for care in defence design in a sensitive landscape

Coastal defences such as groyne complexes and the massive boulders of so-called "rock armour" may be necessary and effective, at least in the short term, but few would describe them as attractive.

Positioning them on Suffolk's Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty can be a controversial issue in landscape terms - but help is now at hand for decision-makers in the form of detailed report commissioned by the Touching the Tide Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Produced by Cambridge-based landscape architecture and environmental planning specialists Alison Farmer Associates, in association

with civil engineering consultants HR Wallingford, the Cambridge Coastal Research Unit and multi-disciplinary company Countryside, the report aims to "raise the profile of landscape issues" in the coastal sea defence decision-making process.

It points out that there is "currently no systematic framework to enable the visual and other impacts of coastal defence options on landscape character to be formally considered alongside the potential impacts on nature conservation and the historic environment."

This presented a "particular difficulty" in situations such as within the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, "where landscape is recognised as

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Suffolk Coastal Sea Defences report,
Alison Farmer Associates

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having national significance and yet the potential for coastal change is so great. In these situations it is important to understand the landscape and visual impacts of any form on coastal defence and intervention in order to inform decision making."

The report gives a thorough overview of the situation on the Suffolk

coast. In its conclusion, it "advocates that landscape and visual effects should be understood and evaluated during the selection of a preferred option for the treatment of the coast, and described, classified, evaluated and assessed during the design and assessment process."

It adds: "Coastal Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty form some of our most valued landscapes in England. Coastal defences should be designed not to devalue this resource, by considering landscape and visual impact early in the design process, building in mitigation as part of the iterative design process, and so helping to reduce the need for secondary mitigation which is difficult to achieve effectively."

Coastal sea defences should be designed "with care, giving consideration to form, size, colour, material and location. They should be integrated with other coastal elements and obtrusive ancillary features should be minimised.

"The delivery of high-quality coastal landscapes ultimately requires all parties to be mindful of landscape and visual effects and to work together to find landscape-friendly solutions."

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■ **Viewing of the full report, Suffolk Coastal Sea Defences. Potential Landscape and Visual Effects, can be arranged by contacting Touching the Tide project manager Bill Jenman at Bill.Jenman@suffolk.gov.uk**