coastal management
in partnership

History of the Suffolk Coast

Last Ice-age

At the end of the last ice-age there was no Suffolk coast and England was connected to mainland Europe through Doggerland. Since then through a combination of; weak sediment based land forms which are easily eroded, sea level rise through the melting of land-based ice, and isostatic readjustment (the rebound of the Earth's crust once the weight of the ice is removed, in north and west Britain, which leads to the tilt and subsequent sinking of southeast England) has lead to the coastline we know today.

Demise of Dunwich

Probably the best known example of coastal change and erosion on the Suffolk coast is the demise of Dunwich. In 1286 and again in 1328, storms destroyed the harbour and swept a large portion of the town into the sea. Again, in 1347, approximately 400 houses were destroyed by a storm and much of the remainder of the town was lost to coastal erosion over the next two to three hundred years. This led to Dunwich going from a major port and religious centre to being the quiet village that it is today.

Victorian era and looking forwards

The major man-made defences along the Suffolk coast were constructed in the Victorian era with the development of coastal resorts, such as Felixstowe and Lowestoft, which we can still see today.

Erosion and sea-level rise continue to be a threat and coastal communities are at risk of flooding and loss of land to the sea. They are likely to become more vulnerable in future with the impact of a changing climate. In some circumstances it may not be suitable to defend, maintain, or possible to fund defences along the coast. This means that options to adapt to the changing coastline need to be developed. A sustainable approach to balance social, economic and environmental issues is essential to finding a way forward.

The DCs are working together with government agencies, key partners and local communities through the Suffolk Coast Forum to find better ways to influence and contribute to the management of the coastal area.

The biggest threat to coastal areas is a tidal surge. The best known and a tragic incidence of this occurred in 1953 where lives were lost in Suffolk, Norfolk and Northern Europe. In 2013 a similar surge was experienced, however with the improved coastal defences and monitoring systems in place, no lives were lost and damage to property was limited.

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