

New horizons and landscapes

Where and Who

Region: North East

Area: Northumbria

Team: Local Levy team

What

The 4shores project is about new horizons, landscapes and species rich habitats. A natural resource will be created that will be enjoyed by wildlife, human residents and visitors. The project aims to: deliver sustainable flood risk management whilst at the same time reducing maintenance costs on rural flood embankments. We want to create and enhance wildlife habitats, improve nature based recreational activities along the coast and work in a positive partnership, especially with farmers.



How

How the approach manages flood risk.

The existing tidal flood defences along the Northumberland Coast were built to protect grazing land from flooding and cannot withstand extreme high tides. To maintain and increase the level of protection of pastureland would mean that maintenance and repair costs for the outdated defences would increase substantially over the next 10 years. This is not a sustainable use of limited resources, particularly given changing farming priorities.

Cost

Alnmouth Phase 1: c. £50K, plus in kind advice from Natural England and Northumberland Coast AONB. Funding through the Local Levy, Northumbria Regional Flood Defence Committee £380K. We also want to attract additional external funding.

How we did it

The project works with farmers and other groups to find a more sustainable approach to flood risk management, working with natural processes rather than trying to fight them. Farmers taking part in the scheme receive payments for habitat management through the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (Natural England).

Alnmouth Phase 1: The Environment Agency breached two flood banks on pastureland adjacent to the Aln Estuary in Alnmouth as part of an innovative approach to managing coastal flooding. The Alnmouth works, covering approximately 8 ha (20 acres) of pastureland, are the first phase in the wider Northumberland 4shores Project.

The in-house workforce started the engineering work in September 2006. We breached two sections of floodbank over a total distance of 270m to allow natural tidal processes over the pastureland in two fields adjacent to the River Aln estuary. We also created two shallow ponds to hold water for wading birds and other wildlife. By allowing natural coastal processes to function, we are creating habitats such as saltmarsh, and redressing the balance for habitats lost over recent decades.

8ha of salt marsh, open water and coastal floodplain grazing habitat has been created to date. Generally, local response to the project has been positive. The project delivers value for money on rural and coastal flood risk management as well as landscape solutions. For example there is a benefit in a salt marsh habitat as a natural defence for dispersing wave energy.

Challenges

Public perceptions of breaching flood defences and ongoing consultation and communication.

What we'd do differently

Fuller public consultation before implementation works started. Some differences in implementation details, e.g. build new bank behind old bank before breach!

Aspects of Making Space for Water

Restoring natural coastal processes to restore habitats and provide a more sustainable approach to flood risk management. It is also a good example of stakeholder engagement.

Partners

Local farmers and landowners, Northumbria Regional Flood Defence Committee, Natural England, Northumberland Coast AONB, Northumberland Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

Cost

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Timing and Status

September 2006-March 2009

The status is current with Alnmouth Phase 2 and Beal works planned for Autumn 2007. In addition, we are looking at opportunities for habitat developments at other sites along the Northumberland coast.

For further information contact:
Northumberland 4shores Project Manager



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