

Coastal erosion on the menu -

A long-term strategy to manage the impact of coastal erosion in north Norfolk will require new thinking and solutions, said a senior UEA researcher at the latest December meeting.

Dr Sophie Day told members of Stalham Farmers' Club that about £14m funding was available in north Norfolk over the next five years to develop solutions to loss of the coastline to the sea.

Two local authority districts, North Norfolk and the East Riding of Yorkshire, have been identified by central government as the most vulnerable to erosion. These two districts had about 85pc of the country's properties at risk from the sea.

Dr Day, who has spent about 20 years researching erosion on the east coast, said that climate change has caused sea levels to rise and more frequent extreme weather events. Even if global zero carbon emissions were to cease immediately, it was likely that the impacts of climate change would continue for at least 30 to 50 years, she warned.

In a lengthy analysis, she emphasised the complexity of developing practical solutions. It was not as simple as just building hard sea defences or just allowing coastal retreat because so many factors, not least the devastating impact on loss of property, housing stock, infrastructure and so on.

It was not also helped that too often a "piecemeal" approach was taken by various arms of government at all levels from parish, district to regional and central government.

In reply to questions and comments from club members, she accepted that often on-the-ground policies were sometimes short-sighted or just contradictory. Dr Day understood criticism that there was a lack of a joined-up strategy. For example, in simple terms, local authorities were responsible for dealing with coastal erosion but responsibility for flood-related issues was an Environment Agency concern.

While government has provided some £200m towards a national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy, there was an obvious need for more sensitive, local solutions.

She said that part of the work in North Norfolk through the snappily-titled Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme (CTAP) could identify ways to support individuals, businesses and communities adapt and potentially move away from threatened or at risk areas of the coastline.

While some areas would have priority to safeguard important infrastructure like the Bacton gas terminals or Sizewell nuclear power stations, a new approach was an imperative for other sections of the coastline. Again, she stressed the economic importance of the coastal belt for tourism, food production and also heritage.

It was also vital that local knowledge and interests were taken into account by policy-makers. Dr Day suggested that North Norfolk could be to the fore on the national stage in developing practical, informed solutions to this long-term problem. There were some encouraging examples, often on a small-scale, which had started in some villages and communities but much more, bolder ideas needed to be implemented, especially on the affordable housing issue.

One member suggested that a culture of encouraging openness from agencies, all levels of local and national government and even commercial bodies could generate some imaginative and practical solutions.

Dr Day was presented with a copy of Alec Douet's book, Breaking New Ground – a history of Norfolk farming from 1914 to 1984.

Wednesday, December 14, 2022 at Rossi's, North Walsham.

The chairman, William Sands, welcomed the speaker, Dr Sophie Day, senior researcher at the University of East Anglia. Earlier, a total of 18 members and guests enjoyed a supper of chicken breast wrapped in bacon, followed by Christmas pudding.

Welcome – Dr Sophie Day. William Sands, chairman, explained that the guest speaker would have to leave by 9pm at the latest, so he proposed that the club's brief business would be taken after her presentation.

The club's business session resumed at 8.50pm. The chairman, William Sands, thanked the 32 members and guests for their attendance.

Apologies – George Gay, president; Tim Papworth, Robin Baines, Alistair and Junko Wright, Christopher Deane, Thomas Love, Robert Cook.

New Members – Toby Adams, who was a grandson of the late Cyril Adams, proposed Chris Borrett, seconded, Michael Pollitt. Agreed.

Chairman's remarks. He was delighted that Jonathan Pye was willing to become vice-chairman, which was agreed.

He also briefly reported on a committee meeting, which had been held earlier in the month. It was felt that the club's current email circulation list needed updating. For several years, thanks to the generous support of former chairman Chris Borrett, emails had been sent from Adams & Howling. However, it was proposed that from next year, emails would be sent using the club's website address – chairman@ or secretary@ Again, webmaster Tim Papworth had agreed to help.

Secretary's remarks. Michael Pollitt proposed, seconded Ken Leggett, and agreed that the club make a donation of £350 to Thetford's Charles Burrell Centre towards its community food initiatives. In March, Nik Chapman had briefed members on the challenges of helping the local community source food and produce. The centre has since developed a thriving local community kitchen and ran regular events to encourage more cooking of nutritious food at home.

In closing, the chairman said that it was planned to hold more social-type gatherings and maybe some different types of meetings in the coming year.

The next meeting – Wednesday, January 11 would be at Rossi's when Julian Barnwell would be talking about the discovery of the wreck of the Gloucester off Great Yarmouth. The talk, "Secrets of the Deep" would be open to members, partners and their guests. In addition, young farmers would be invited to supper beforehand as the club's guests.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.