

Phil Woolas,
Minister(Environment),
DEFRA,
Nobel House,
17 Smith Square,
London SW1P 3JR

Dear Mr Woolas

We, the people and friends of Walberswick, Suffolk are sending out an SOS to you. We are calling on DEFRA to save our shingle ridge, save our marshes and save our community by reversing your recent decisions to retreat and let the sea in all around us.

Walberswick, its surroundings and the whole Blyth estuary make up an area of outstanding natural beauty that is recognised regionally and nationally. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come regularly to enjoy the beach, the village and all the walks in the surrounding areas of marshes, reedbeds and the Blyth estuary. It is a much loved corner of England.

The village has a wonderful, vibrant history and the community will not stand by and see its future washed away.

We know that there is only so much money to go round – but we are not asking for more Government money. We are asking you to spend our money better. It is financial madness not to spend money now on defences and then end up spending 10 or 20 times as much in a few years' time on raising the A12 at Blythburgh to keep the East Coast open when the road gets washed away.

We need some joined-up thinking and expenditure between DEFRA and Transport before we don't have a joined-up country.

What's more, it is madness that far more money is being spent by your agencies on habitat for the birds, flora and fauna than on our threatened communities.

And it's madness that bizarre EU rules mean that your agency Natural England will not let your Environment Agency even get into the shingle area to rebuild the ridge to protect us. Not to mention giving up on the largest single freshwater reedbed in the country – while spending a fortune on replacing that habitat elsewhere.

Everyone seems very keen to say that it's inevitable. It is not. There is nothing inevitable about it. Holland wouldn't exist if they had just said the sea coming in was inevitable. This Government needs some Dutch courage to spend our money sensibly.

The only thing that's inevitable is that if we lose the funding for sea and river defences, we lose the beach – and if we lose the beach, we lose the soul of the village. And then everyone loses.

We demand that DEFRA:

Commits to fund maintenance of the shingle bank between Walberswick and Dunwich

Repairs the breaches to all the floodbank defences on the River Blyth immediately

Commits to fund maintenance and restoration of all Blyth floodbank defences into the future

Walberswick is a village under threat. We will not retreat. We will never surrender. And we will keep sending this SOS to you until you and the rest of your Government see sense.

Signed.....