

# ARTHOG

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COUNCIL

Clerc/Clerk – ANGELA THOMAS

TAIR TREM, PENRHYN DRIVE NORTH, FAIRBOURNE, GWYNEDD LL38 2DJ

Ffon/Phone: 07831 697611/07757 640740

Email: [cyngorarthogcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:cyngorarthogcouncil@gmail.com)

URL: <http://www.cyngorarthogcouncil.cymru>

18th November 2019

FAO:

Catrin Wager – Cabinet Member, Gwynedd Council

Huw Williams – YGC , Gwynedd Council

Stuart Eves – Chairman – Arthog Community Council

**Ref: Fairbourne: Framework for the Future – Presentation 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

Dear Catrin and Huw

Comments regarding the above, submitted 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Because this is such an important public consultation document to respond to, I have asked for help from someone more versed in this kind of report and how to formulate a precise reply. I shall refer to this person as C.H. I am extremely grateful for the input from C.H. The result is a collaboration of input from both C.H. and myself, on behalf of the Arthog Community Council, and I am sure, the Residents of Fairbourne.

It was appreciated that a good number of the stakeholders were present to answer questions and try and alleviate the concerns of residents. It was also appreciated that The Welsh Assembly were represented by Lowri Norrington-Davies and colleague on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Liz Saville-Roberts also attended, briefly. Gregor Guthrie proved to be quite controversial, with comments such as, ending his career on a project like this was better than he could have wished for.

Network Rail were conspicuous by their absence. It was a relief to hear that the electricity and water will remain on until the last homeowner leaves Fairbourne.

THE BROCHURE: [www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/News/Press](http://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/News/Press)

**Pages 1 and 2.** The cover says it is produced by the “Fairbourne Moving Forward Partnership” so what is the partnership? It is perhaps ironic that the existence of the

Community Council is only acknowledged on page 13 where its logo is depicted alongside all other partners. This might appear strange to some but is in line with the fact that when it came to the production of this document the community was not involved, and the Arthog Community Council was neither consulted or given a copy prior to the Public Event. Strange, as it's Fairbourne's Framework.

**The Cover Photograph:** The cover shows two contrasting photographs, one with Fairbourne as it currently sits with the sea stopping at the beach, but not showing the £1 million plus new rock armour sea defenses completed in early 2019, nor the tank traps up on the Promenade at Friog Corner. The second picture depicts the static caravan park site at Friog Corner standing in flood water. This picture was taken just after the storm in the 2014 storm, a 1 in 100-year event. This is a misleading photograph as it implies that Fairbourne is subject to constant flooding. Unlike other coastal areas that were decimated in the 2014 storm, Fairbourne did not flood. The picture implies a present and insurmountable threat.

**Pages 3. The Consultation:** In the very first sentence it is stated that the booklet forms part of a consultation process, with residents, homeowners and stakeholders, that had started in 2013. Sadly, there is scant evidence either in the document itself, in the preparation of the document and in the Gwynedd Council's policy that there is any genuine consultation taking place. The residents were not equal partners or consulted effectively in the preparation of the document. The only firm assumption that the document makes is namely that beyond 2054, "it will no longer be safe nor sustainable to remain in Fairbourne". This has not been agreed with the residents. Drop-in meetings are not consultations.

**Is Fairbourne Unique?** The document says Fairbourne is unique. However, the Fairbourne preliminary Coastal Adaption Masterplan states: "Climate change is happening and will, increasingly, have a major impact and influence on the way in which we manage the coast, respond to the risks of flooding and coastal change and how we use the coastal area in the future". In this respect Fairbourne is not unique; there are several areas within Gwynedd, around the coast of Wales, and more broadly across the UK, where different aspects of adaption are now coming to the fore. The community of Fairbourne and the Community Council would like to know where the similar communities are, and what other adaptations are being considered.

**Breaking New Ground:** The foreword quite rightly points out that we are "in new territory" and importantly highlights the need for legislation and national guidance but does not go on to say any more about this. What it should be, when it should be introduced and how this would effect/help the Fairbourne situation. It also talks about "support from the UK Government". It is implied that coastal management is devolved, however the decision as to whether a whole community should be decommissioned in the UK should be discussed at UK Government level. When Welsh communities such as Port Talbot or the Valleys come under threat there is an expectation in many quarters that the UK Government has a duty and obligation to step in. East Yorkshire has just been treated as a national emergency with the PM heading up a COBRA meeting.

**Pages 4-6.: The figures:** Information about the profile of the community of Fairbourne. Limited information, some relevant some not relevant. However, the document does not go

on to explore the figures. For instance, what relevance does the statement have, that 62% of the population of Fairbourne is over 55+? The retirement age for the working population these days can be as high 67/68, these workers still contributing to the economy of Wales!!!

“Missing profile data”. “Businesses based in the area”. “Jobs based in and around Fairbourne, Schools and attendance, and infrastructure in the affected area”

“**Linked Communities**”: What is hugely ignored is that Fairbourne **is not an island**. Other communities will be impacted by the demise of the Village. Notably the parts of Fairbourne that will not be flooded, Barmouth, the Mawddach estuary dwellings, Arthog, Friog, the communities along the arterial road leading into Barmouth, and of course Dolgellau itself.

### **Pages 7-9. The Science: Reasons given for the risk to Fairbourne:**

The Terms: Predicted increases in sea level rise over a 100-year period  
The height of the water table

The argument given is that by 2054, if not before, the sea level will have risen to the extent that the current sea defenses will not be high enough or strong enough to prevent, in the event of an overtopping, an ingress into homes. There is no consideration given to strengthening or extending the existing defenses other than to say it is too expensive. However, there is no indication of what the costing would be, and no comparison between the cost of maintenance and the cost of decommissioning. This should be explored, and the costings made public.

**Rising water table:** The continued de-silting and maintenance of the ditch system within Fairbourne, and an investigation into the height of the sluice and the diameter of the pipes, will no doubt have an impact on the height of the water table.

**The Science of Prediction:** And that is exactly what it is, prediction. Nobody is denying that there is a problem with the climate, however, have the figures and data of the author, Greg Guthrie been sufficiently checked, and stress tested. It is not unusual in cases of prediction shaping future planning, that there is a public enquiry, especially when a single engineer’s figures are impacting on the mental health of a community and have caused house/property prices to halve.

**The stated land level figures:** Although it is stated that Barmouth and Aberystwyth are on higher ground than Fairbourne, there is no disputing that in the 2014 storm when Fairbourne **did not flood**, the railway bridge end of Barmouth at the Last Inn and the top end of Barmouth (the Council houses) did flood and residents had to be rescued as their properties were inundated by 3/4ft of water. These two areas in Barmouth flood on a regular basis. The sea front at Aberystwyth sustained considerable damage in the 2014 storm as documented on many television reports.

**Page 10 and 11:** West of Wales Shoreline Management Plan 2. Fairbourne First: The document forecasts that “the engineering and financial challenges of protecting the village

are likely to become insurmountable sooner than in other areas". Will other areas face a similar problem sooner, same time or later than Fairbourne? Is the document implying that the financial challenges for other areas such as Borth, Ynyslas and Dinas Dinlle will be overcome? (The SMP2 is not a document for the lay person.)

**Managed realignment:** The document states that this will start "**at some point between 2025 and 2054**". This is telling residents that relocation **could** start in 5 years' time. According to the document realignment involves "relocation of property owners and business from Fairbourne". In Plan 2 on page 21 reference is made to adaptations and homes in a "semi tidal environment". There is some explanation of this in the Coastal Adaption Masterplan, 4.0. What are the Opportunities? People and the built environment, Infrastructure, Business, Natural Environment and Gwynedd Council. The Plan sets out clearly the end of Fairbourne but references some experimental options that are only referenced very briefly in the new Framework document. What is clearly in the Framework document is the idea that residents could **start moving from as early as 2025** but what is not there is an option or suggestion as to **how, when or where to, and how it will be financed?**

**Pages 12 and 13.** A collection of Logos. Interestingly, Arthog Community Council logo is now included in the Fairbourne Moving Forward Partnership. The Fairbourne Moving Forward Partnership has not been updated on the website since 2017.

**Pages 14, 15 and 16.** These three pages highlight the fact that the SMP2 was finalised in 2012, almost nothing has progressed since then other than the fact that the sea level has risen. The residents have not been sufficiently engaged with to a degree of being able to shape and frame the options, or to choose options. It shows residents are from time to time given information but are never real participants. What residents or the Community Council have not seen is hard/actual data showing sea level rise.

**The Masterplan:** The list of objectives on this page is **a clear visual acknowledgement** that real resident engagement and involvement in decision making has **never been** an objective. Engagement is seen as linked to education.

As an aside: A Gold Award for YGC employees. The Judges' comments as follows:

*"a practical resilience plan for a community living with the risks of climate change. This must be the skill shown in **engaging and educating** the community of their growing climate change risk and has resulted in **ownership** by the community".* Simply not true and very condescending wording. The residents of Fairbourne are not knuckling dragging idiots in need of educating.

*"A strong and effective decision-making process. This must be the **rollercoaster of a psychological journey since media reports in March 2014 which presented erroneous information that subsequently blighted the village. Initial feeling of shock, anger, disbelief and finally acknowledgement now means that residents play an active part in the project and the future of the community and many aspects of governance has effectively been***

*devolved down to the community to a point where they make suggestions for the way forward and want to take responsibility for their future – wherever that may be*". Really!!!

### **Page 17 onwards: The Way Forward.**

The chart is confusing. It may be clear to the person that devised it but has the most limited of headings and colour blocks without any legend. It then states below that "this detailed process has concluded that the favoured approach should be: Maintaining Fairbourne's Flood Defenses up to 2054 and the provision of Social Support to residents over this period". There is no evidence that residents have been a part of this process, and there are no indicators as to why stopping at 2054 in the "favoured approach". One might have expected to see a listing of factors on which these options were judged against, including costings.

The first benefit listed is "reducing uncertainty". This is the type of uncertainty reduction that a hospital patient will experience when told by the Doctor, "we don't know if we can save the leg, but to reduce your uncertainty we will be amputating it next week".

**Page 18:** The Roadmap for the next 25 years. Over the next 10 pages there is no roadmap and a complete lack of any detail. Tasks are predominantly red, with a listing of "no funding". The satnav is broken.

**Page 19 to 20:** 4 of 7 tasks do not have agreed funding including probably the most important, that is the developing of the FCERM. One of two tasks shown as green, the Major Incident Plan, has not been completed to the satisfaction of residents. Flood Management Risks, 5 of 5 all red

**Page 21 to 23:** People and the Built Environment: 12 of 14 all red. All the risks highlighted are in the highest risk category including threat to life, health and financial loss. Amazingly these are just flagged up but not commented on and no explanation of a plan to reduce the risks.

**Page 24 and 25:** Infrastructure Management and Management Risk. The key tasks around decommissioning of service and sustaining the railways are red. No funding is identified for 75% of the tasks.

**Page 26 to 28:** Economy and Business Management. 5 tasks, 4 subject to funding being available. Impact on the people, 4 of 5, red.

**Page 29 to 30:** Natural Environment Management: 7 Tasks. Work yet to start, funding to be sourced. The risks to the environment and people, medium and high.

**Page 31 to 40:** A strong and effective decision-making process, (previously covered) glossary and have we missed anything feedback forms.

**Take the 5 Plans as whole,** astonishingly 27 out of 34 tasks listed have no funding or need further funding. This of itself must surely undermine the whole planned concept to end the village by 2054. The plan is not viable.

What did this glossy brochure tell the residents of Fairbourne about their future? NOTHING except decommission will commence sometime after 2025 and the village will no longer exist after 2054. All this is based on supposition. Show us the real actual data.

In summary this document is extremely poor, it shares very little information other than an end date and that important tasks are unfunded. It highlights the fact that there has been little consultation with the Community, drop in meetings are not consultation meetings. It does not address or make mention of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act (2015). It does not meet with the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, a national set of standards that have been endorsed by Gwynedd Council. It gives the impression that countless organisations within Wales, the UK and even The Netherlands have been making decisions regarding Fairbourne. It is implied that the community has "taken ownership" of its future, whereas it is absolutely the opposite.

In light of this, consideration should be given to Gwynedd Council halting its process for consultation, and that they do the following: -

Agree with the Community and Arthog Community Council, a structure for engagement and consultation that enables the following as a minimum

A relaunch of a residents organisation that has the primary focus of dealing with the future of Fairbourne and all that that entails. Ask Gwynedd Council to support the group with funding and Council Officers.

To set up a local consultative board that is made up of representatives of the above Residents organisation group, the Arthog Community Council and other relevant agencies. The group must have a say on preparing and choosing options and consultation documents.

The Arthog Community Council must insist that it is an equal status partner in the Fairbourne Moving Forward Partnership. All outputs from that partnership will have involved full and equal input from the Arthog Community Council.

Gwynedd Council must commit to fully consulting with all residents and ensure that residents are a part of developing options and ultimately have choice in choosing The best way forward. This should include balloting the residents.

#### **Other Observations:**

**The Fairbourne Moving Forward Partnership.** There does not appear to be anything added since 2017. There is no email address given. There is no newsletter since 2017.

**The Facilitator.** A complete waste of taxpayers' money. Demeaning and frankly condescending.

One of the many people from the press who have reported on the plight of Fairbourne, who actually visited the Village and has subsequently read the Fairbourne: Framework for the Future, wrote to me and has said "*there still seems to be a shortage of detail about what financial support/help will be offered to residents who have seen the value of their homes collapse and face enormous difficulties moving*". He has hit the nail on the head.

Yours faithfully,

*Angela Thomas*

ANGELA THOMAS – CLERK with assistance from C.H.  
For and on behalf of Arthog Community Council

Cc: Liz Saville-Roberts

Sian Williams – Head of Operations NRW North Wales

Dyfrig L. Siencyn – Leader, Gwynedd Council

Lowri Norrington-Davies – Welsh Government: Please pass a copy to James Morris

Lisa Goodier – YGC