
Fairbourne Health Impact Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Background

Fairbourne, in Gwynedd, is one of many communities facing challenges and risks due to climate change. Fairbourne Moving Forward was set up as a multi-agency project to work alongside the community, to plan and take action as necessary in response to scientific evidence and the most likely outcomes for the area. The 'People' workstream is one of six workstreams established by the Project Board. It recognises the potential impact on people's health and wellbeing of living with uncertainties due to climate change.

Cyngor Gwynedd, on behalf of the Fairbourne Moving Forward Project Board, commissioned Savills to undertake a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) in Spring 2022, which was conducted during the latter part of 2022 and early 2023. The core objective of the HIA is two-fold; to investigate the health and wellbeing impacts of living with climate change in Fairbourne today, and explore community led suggestions and solutions to aid adaptation, build resilience and improve health.

Approach and Methodology

HIA is by nature flexible, tailored to what is to be assessed, the decision-making process it is intended to inform, and the community it is within. In this instance there is as yet, no defined policy or application to assess. The HIA is instead geared to exploring local community circumstance, experience and gathering community led recommendations to inform and refine strategic investment and local planning. In this context, the HIA is being applied to ensure health and wellbeing are central to all strategic development, investment and placemaking affecting Fairbourne.

Local Circumstance

Fairbourne is a coastal village in Gwynedd, Wales, located between the Mawddach Estuary and southern Snowdonia National Park. The golden sand beach runs from the Friog corner cliff edge, spanning the entire community and extending to the mouth of the estuary and ferry to Barmouth. The built-up area runs parallel to the beach, with the north eastern most edge of residential properties starting from the Golf Course and Club House, extending south towards the Friog corner and east towards the Fairbourne Train Station.

The community is supported by an impressive array of community amenities and facilities rare for its size and coastal nature, including a well-used multi-use community hall, school, shops, restaurants, hotel, golf course and Club House, narrow gauge train/preservation society (museum), and campsite. The village is well connected by nature paths and trim trails, including a footbridge adjoining the rail line over the estuary into Barmouth.

The village is comprised of 506 homes, with a permanent population of approximately 700 residents, increasing to 3,000 during the summer months. While the population in Wales increased by 2.5% between 2014 and 2020, the population in Fairbourne fell by 2.2%, and displays an increasing elderly age demographic, with a high proportion of the population over 60 and a low proportion of those aged between 0-34 and 40-49 when compared to the national average.

While there is always variation within a population, despite indications of contraction, and an increasing aged population, local health circumstance typically remains considerably better than the national average.

Community Engagement Results

The engagement strategy comprised online and hardcopy questionnaires distributed to every household; a three day drop in session event; key community representative interviews, and supplementary interviews for those interested in engaging, but

unable to attend in person. The response rate equates to 21% of all households, and approximately 15% of the entire resident population of Fairbourne, which represents good engagement by the community.

Issues and Solutions

The table below summarises the key themes raised when exploring issues and solutions. Some lend well to informing statutory bodies' strategic investment, while others would be best owned and delivered through community initiatives. Some fall well beyond the influence of the community or those represented on the Fairbourne Moving Forward Project Board, and are better captured through institutional changes.

Table E-1: Actions for Consideration

Item	Context
Sea Ramp	Re-provision of the Sea Ramp was one of the clearest requests made during engagement, and the delay to re-provide what is considered a critical community asset has come to symbolise opinions of a lack of Council investment and abandonment.
Public Messaging and Improved Community Communication and Engagement	"Why Fairbourne" was a consistent and underpinning message to all the discussions, and the positive messaging from Cyngor Gwynedd that there are no plans for decommissioning had a profound effect on the majority of participants. The consistent community response however, is that the statement needs to be expanded upon, and amplified to match that in the public domain and address "climate change blight".
Remodelling of climate scenarios	Individuals expressed the need to better understand the likelihood of when sea level rises would be untenable, from infrequent events (1 in 10-year flood events), enabling them to plan out and rationalise their own decisions over the next 75 years. A clear, robust remodelling statement is recommended to improve transparency, underpin investment or abandonment of sea defences, and enable residents' sufficient information to make decisions. This would need to be made readily accessible to residents.
Transparency and Trust between Cyngor Gwynedd and the Fairbourne Community	It is recommended to discuss, establish and maintain a Fairbourne Climate Adaptation and Resilience information website, signposting to key information and programmes, including community led initiatives, an FAQ, flood monitoring data and storm warnings.
Flood Prevention and Environmental Maintenance	Regular maintenance improves resilience to extreme events, and the provision of equipment, training and community management of some aspects could help raise awareness, build local capabilities and expertise, and potentially aid in securing local income and employment for the task within the community.
Sea Defence	Testing the viability of a series of alternative and overlapping sea defence options was raised, including alternatives to the sea ramp, tetrapods through to offshore wave dissipation and energy generation infrastructure, maintaining the existing sea crest and even the use of biological solutions (artificial reef forming and kelping).

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Community Hall Shelter	Testing the viability of investing in a community hall/shelter was raised, with the investment delivering additional co-benefits through an enhanced multifunctional community asset.
Improved access and accessibility	Suggestions ranged from improved drop curbs and pavements to benches and trails (wayfinding) and improved beach access to respond to the aged demographic need, build climate resilience and help to maintain healthy independent living for longer.
Access and Accessibility to Health Care	Explore the provision of visiting adult social care, children's services and health services, be it a nurse, GP, mobile screening unit, and a community ambulance service when there is no alternative. This overlaps with Public Health strategies to respond to demand in general, but to also adapt and build resilience to climate change for those most vulnerable. What can be explored through strategic investment, is the provision of multifunctional spaces to best accommodate visiting practitioners or external power supplies for mobile screening units in suitable parking areas, while also potentially serving as a flexible space which could respond to emergency events.
Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Guidance	Guidance on what household investments and modifications could be considered for climate adaptation and consented would be valuable, as would signposting to any government support or grants. Building community resilience through improving housing value has the potential to address the climate change blight that the community face.
Emergency Evacuation Plan Clarity	A common concern, driven by climate change, was the lack of transparency on any Emergency Evacuation Plan. Transparency on what might trigger an emergency event and how the community will be notified is needed, either as a formal statement, or in the FAQ. This overlaps with the public messaging aspect and clear information on any Fairbourne Climate Adaptation and Resilience information web site.
Community Adaptation and resilience fund	Greater community say and control of adaptation and resilience features was a consistent message throughout the engagement process and lends to greater collaboration, community awareness and support. To complement the strategic funding, a resilience fund, to supplement the management, monitoring and enhancement of adaptation and resilience features in Fairbourne is worth exploring.
Community Notification System / Early Warning System	The viability of a community notification system, as a web-based tool, providing web and mobile text updates on tides, surges, weather conditions, and if the beach is manned by lifeguards would aid preparedness in general, but also build safety, and resilience.
Emergency Vehicle	A number of participants expressed challenges with public transport, particularly for hospital visits, and the viability of taxis due to cost. Testament to the community spirit, volunteers often ferry individuals to appointments, but this is dependent upon the availability and suitability of the vehicle. A maintained community vehicle would be valuable in this context, where licenced individuals/volunteers can apply and make use of a suitable vehicle for such trips, and the vehicle

Item	Context
	can double as a community asset should it be needed to convey individuals with impaired mobility during emergency events. This addresses an existing need, improves conveyance safety and comfort, and also builds community independence and resilience in general and to climate change.
Community Climate Adaptation and Resilience Partnership	A key feature of the community feedback was the desire to have greater transparency of statutory body-led climate adaptation and resilience initiatives and programmes, but also greater influence and even ownership of certain aspects. One of the ways to address this would be through a partnership between the community and key statutory partners. This would not only repair and build trust, but opens new funding opportunities for the Community to explore and manage in collaboration with wider programmes. With support from strategic partners, the value to the community is significant, reinforcing the position and influence of the community on climate change discussions, and opening up wider opportunities for funding programmes and targeted research of benefit to Fairbourne and wider communities.
Community Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan (CCARP)	As part of the partnership, it is recommended to develop a CCARP where particular hazards from climate change are firstly established and prioritised, with intervention and support initiatives driven by community effort. This works through the previously discussed partnership as it would develop and complement wider programmes and initiatives. Being community led, secured funding can be directed with more autonomy and respond more rapidly to local priorities and needs (subject to any funding brief and the regulatory planning system).

The summarised community led initiatives are very much geared to improving transparency but also greater ownership and influence on climate change adaptation and resilience. The lack of transparency coupled with climate change blight, and being powerless to respond has understandably resulted in a constant state of community wide anxiety. The community led suggestions aid in bringing back control over their lives, aids in addressing climate change anxiety, and enables greater energy and resources to be a more “solution focussed” partnership between the community and the wider Project Board.

Institutional Change

Climate change adaptation and resilience cannot be piecemeal, where the systems that govern our lives need to adapt at the same time and pace, or else negate mitigation and possibly compound environmental, economic and social impacts. Engagement with the Fairbourne community helped to identify institutional factors that also need to adapt, with UK wide ramifications.

The key issue underpinning climate change blight is the way mortgages are determined. This appears to be still largely a flood risk map that fails to take into account the fabric of the building, or any adaptations made that would improve resilience and manage the risk. When extrapolated out to the rest of the UK, the current systems mean swathes of housing, could well be blighted in the same way very soon.

A potential solution is the development of a household Climate Change Adaptation Rating, similar to the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating on homes.

This means if someone has invested in increasing the resilience of their home to climate change and flooding, the risk is lower, and could be considered in the mortgage as well as insurance.

Under such a scheme, there is the potential that:

- mortgage companies would have greater confidence and take on less risk, but also maintain their existing market areas that might otherwise be lost to them;
- the value extends to commercial and residential insurance providers, where the fabric and design of the building could improve coverage, reduce risk and rates;
- swathes of homes will be retained, and their values will remain commensurate with surrounding areas, averting significant housing value instability and climate change blight;
- homeowners and landlords would be encouraged to better adapt and build resilience into their homes (including through now viable equity release schemes);
- community upheaval and significant demographic change that would impact the long-term viability of communities, amenities and health care is averted;
- the potential impact on social care (for those that would have nowhere else to go) is averted;
- the disproportionate impact upon the most sensitive members of our society and associated inequality would be averted; and
- a new sector and technical specialism are created that will accelerate adaptation and resilience in the UK.

The value of this institutional adaptation is compelling, and the EPC requirement paves the way for a similar approach, which will result in a coordinated effort and cumulative benefit. If viable, credit for this needs to go to the Fairbourne community, reinforcing the positive message and example.

Conclusion

Climate change will affect every community throughout the UK in some way or form, yet it is coastal areas that are at greatest risk due to the combination of coastal erosion, more frequent and intense precipitation, and rising ground water and sea levels. There is further evidence to suggest greater community sensitivity, where coastal communities can be more isolated and typically have a higher proportion of elderly residents, vulnerable to extreme temperatures and weather events and added complexity during emergency response. Climate change blight is further modifying demography, accelerating the aging population in these areas, while also changing adult social care and public health demand, capacity and costs.

Successful climate adaptation and resilience require:

- National and Local Policy with clear messaging responding to both actual hazards and perceived risks to provide the assurance needed to remove or manage factors leading to climate change blight;
- Coordinated climate change and flood defence infrastructure coupled with appropriate emergency response, equipment provision, training and early warning systems;
- Community partnerships and collaboration to coordinate initiatives and cumulative benefits and provide greater community transparency, ownership and support of government and council led initiatives;
- Institutional changes, where mortgages and equity release blighted by climate change risk or perceived risk will remove the viability of homes and sustainability of communities, compound housing challenges and push more individuals into adult social care and children's services;

- Awareness as to varying community sensitivity and those at most risk to prevent disproportionate impacts, target bespoke adaptation and resilience initiatives, but also varying emergency response tactics and equipment;
- Acknowledging that adaptation is more than preparing for just physical and climatic change, but demographic, social, economic and health change, and the supporting infrastructure and public realm requirements to facilitate healthy, resilient, independent living for longer.
- Accurate messaging and media.

Achievements to Date

The HIA process provided a valuable engagement tool to catalogue concerns, but also explore and discuss potential solutions. A number of these have since been put into place, including the formal position that there are no plans to decommission the community, and more detailed analysis and modelling is underway. The provision of the temporary sea ramp has been actioned, and its monitoring to establish the short, medium and long term value and viability. The existing community forums are in the process of revising their Terms of Reference to expand eligibility for wider grants and charitable funds linked to regeneration, sustainability and climate adaptation. This increase the role of the community in defining and directing projects and initiatives, complementing that of Fairbourne Moving Forward, with greater combined resources and cumulative opportunities.

Actions and Next Steps

Throughout this report, several recommendations can be considered for the strategic funding along with ideas which have been presented by the community as community-led initiatives. Based on the consultation evidence, the important next step would be the dissemination of information. Additionally, although this report was specific to the conditions of Fairbourne, the learning and evidence are relevant to other communities in Wales and the UK, facing similar climate change-related challenges.

To appropriately disseminate the findings of this report, a communication plan is required to ensure various audiences are addressed. The communication plan would include, first and foremost, the Fairbourne community and it would be the first phase of an ongoing process to respond to their needs, and build the necessary partnerships to facilitate a “Climate Resilient Fairbourne”.