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# Fairbourne Coastal Risk Management Learning Project

## Executive Summary

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## Fairbourne Coastal Risk Management Learning Project

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Background

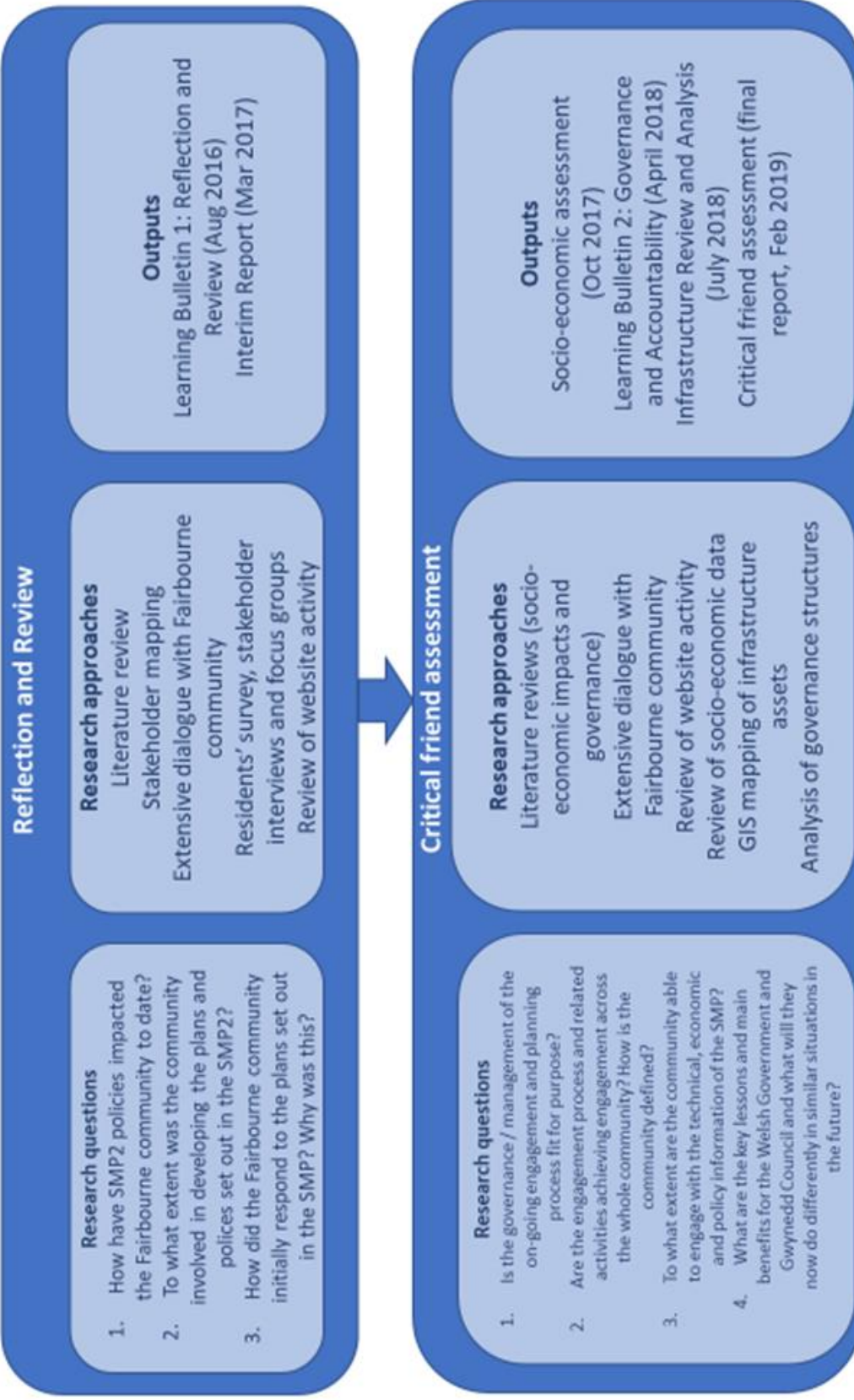
1.1 Fairbourne is a small village in the ward of Arthog in Gwynedd of approximately 420 residential and business properties. Located at the mouth of the Afon Mawddach, it was built as a seaside retreat on newly defended and reclaimed land during the late 19th and early 20th Century with piecemeal development continuing to date. Whilst Fairbourne is currently defended from the sea on both its estuarine and coastal frontages, rising sea levels mean that much of the village of Fairbourne would be below normal high tide levels within the next 50 years. There are also risks from groundwater and surface water flooding. The relevant Shoreline Management Plan (SMP2) policies for the area for 2055 to 2105 may require part, if not all of the village to relocate or disperse elsewhere. The SMP2 policies reflect the understanding that it will not be sustainable to defend Fairbourne in terms of flood defence. The best estimate at present is that this point occurs in 40 to 50 years' time (2052 – 2062). The range of uncertainty is considered to be between 2042 and 2072. These dates relate to future estimates of sea level rise and are ranges due to the uncertainty associate with climate change projections. The implications of these policies have generated significant concerns for the local community, Gwynedd Council and Welsh Government.

1.2 Conducted between October 2015 and August 2018, the Fairbourne Learning Project focused on the impacts and issues facing the Fairbourne community since the adoption and ongoing implementation of the SMP2 policies. The two principal aims of the research project were:

- To undertake a reflection and review of the effect and impact on the Fairbourne community in relation to the SMP2 policy and related engagement activities to date;
- To work alongside the engagement activities of the Fairbourne Moving Forward (FMF) initiative, in a "critical friend" role, providing insights and learning to the on-going planning, research and decision-making and implementation of engagement activities in Fairbourne.

The findings from the research will contribute to a wider evidence base to support the planning and implementation of community and stakeholder processes in other situations in Wales and the UK where coastal communities are facing flood risks.

- 1.3 SMP2 was adopted by the Gwynedd Council Cabinet in January 2013. Arthog Community Council was given a presentation on the adopted SMP2 on 1 May 2013. Whilst the *draft* SMP2 was consulted on with local stakeholders such as Barmouth Town Council, Arthog Community Council and the general public via the local media and a public meeting, there was no written feedback from the local residents. However, concerns were raised and discussed at the public meeting and these views were incorporated within the SMP2 and which pointed to the need for detailed discussion and planning in the delivery of the policies.
- 1.4 A multi-agency Project Board (Fairbourne Moving Forward) was established in 2013. Its objectives were to support the community in the transition towards long term relocation. Accepting the need for change, the principles upon which the project was established were to ensure that the community remained viable, providing a secure place to live, that businesses continued to thrive and that the basic infrastructure and services were maintained. Subsequently, the Fairbourne Facing Change community action group (FFC) was established in February 2014, in part as a direct response to the media attention given to the realignment issues at Fairbourne.
- 1.5 The research methodology followed a “learning project” approach. This enabled analysis and feedback on action as it occurred rather than after the event as with an evaluation. This approach was also intended to help build good relations and trust with stakeholders to facilitate the ongoing delivery of change and help to achieve constructive outcomes within Fairbourne. It allowed a reflection on both processes (how and when things were done) and impacts (what were the results or consequences) associated with the development and implementation of the SMP2. In addition, it helped to identify areas for further guidance and support in Fairbourne alongside issues with a wider and more strategic application. The key research approaches and outputs are illustrated below:-



## **2. Main Project Findings**

2.1 The Reflection and Review stage and Learning Bulletin 1 evaluated the engagement approaches over five phases:-

- SMP2 plan preparation
- Public examination of the draft SMP2
- SMP2 Plan finalisation
- Impacts from SMP2 adoption, including the formation of Fairbourne Facing Change (FFC)
- Subsequent collaborative planning, including the evolution of Fairbourne Moving Forward (FMF)

It identified some forty learning points across four key themes of:-

- Approach to engagement
- Governance and decision-making
- Impact on the community
- Project resources

The principal topics explored further in this report, under each of these themes, are summarised in the table below.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Approach to engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of whole system commitment</li> <li>• Learn lessons or take guidance from others</li> <li>• Set a realistic budget</li> <li>• Know your stakeholders and engage appropriately</li> <li>• Building relationships and trust.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Impact on the community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic impacts: property values, business viability, tourism, development blight and lack of confidence</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing: stress and anxiety and health related issues</li> <li>• Planning and engagement resources: collaborative planning</li> <li>• Community capacity: commitment, community building/organising; collective purpose and community conflict; contentious issues</li> <li>• Relationships with government agencies and partnerships: better relationships</li> <li>• Media interest and focus</li> <li>• Building knowledge and understanding</li> <li>• Community legal challenge</li> <li>• Monitoring and mitigation of impacts.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Governance and decision making</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key questions and concerns on challenging the data, lack of understanding</li> <li>• Clarity of roles, remits and responsibilities</li> <li>• Issues on decisions to set up FMF and FFC, accountability and support</li> <li>• Impact of committed individuals and organisations</li> <li>• Status of the SMP2 plan</li> <li>• Local and strategic issues</li> <li>• Benefits of good governance.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Project Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sources and level of funding</li> <li>• Wider service delivery required to mitigate impacts</li> <li>• Governance model options</li> <li>• Capacity building and collaboration</li> <li>• Communication of roles, timing and methods.</li> </ul>

- 2.2 The second Learning Bulletin focused on governance and accountability – an area which both lacked clarity through the SMP2 engagement and adoption processes but also gained increasing significance around developing and achieving ownership of the production of a Masterplan for Fairbourne, to deliver the extensive and complex changes necessary to act on the implications of the SMP2 policies for the community.
- 2.3 Research was undertaken to capture a number of relevant studies and publications that might help to inform the evolution of Fairbourne’s governance model stemming from the first FMF Board meeting in 2013. It explored the issues and challenges facing FMF and identified wider lessons for coastal adaptation management in Wales and the UK.
- 2.4 14 learning points emerged, differentiated into four themes which, as part of the critical friend role, were discussed at Fairbourne Moving Forward board meetings and with key individuals, both to build an understanding of the existing governance framework and the interventions and decisions that might be necessary to take forward the masterplanning process. The four themes set out in the bulletin were:-
- Ownership
  - Relationships
  - Anticipating change – decision points and pathways
  - Short-term clarity, long term vision.
- 2.5 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, through its 5 Ways of Working with stakeholders, challenges how public bodies deliver services and provides a strong foundation to consider these wider impacts. The Act also established Public Service Boards (PSBs) for all Local Authority areas in Wales. PSBs are comprised of public sector organisations (Local Authorities, Health Boards and Fire and Rescue Authorities) and are responsible for setting local well-being objectives and drafting local well-being plans. The role of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Service Board, in providing an oversight and scrutiny function, developed through its Climate Change Adaptation Sub-Group. It held a workshop in July 2018, with a



further meeting in September 2018. This represented a positive step forward to address multi-agency and complex change management in the context of climate change adaptation.

- 2.6 Further studies and reports were undertaken to support directly the delivery of the Fairbourne Masterplan and improve engagement from key stakeholders, particularly socio-economic and public utilities sectors.
- 2.7 Arising from participation in FMF's Socio-economic Group, a report was produced to provide a clearer evidence base and insights to support efforts to establish effective engagement from stakeholders in this sector. The report also provided a foundation for a socio-economic impact assessment of the Masterplan. Key findings centre on how socio-economic and health impact may vary, depending upon an individual's pre-existing level of vulnerability; the importance of affected communities being well-informed and having their say in decisions and developments and; the degree to which communities become more or less cohesive as a result of actual or potential events and which may lead to positive or negative impacts.
- 2.8 On a more technical level, understanding the resilience and adaptability of key utilities, transport and public infrastructure was central to understanding decision pathways and the extent of engagement required from these sectors, including how asset management planning may impact on the long-term changes planned for Fairbourne. The Infrastructure Report was produced to support the Masterplan development and explore engagement and critical decision pathways relevant to utilities and infrastructure providers. It identified the complexity of decision pathways, with each organisation having competing demands for capital investment and operational expenditure, whilst time horizons for asset management plans would be different and decision-points would not coincide. The interrelationships between utility providers, whether electricity supply for treatment works or pumping stations, reliance on telecom or transport services or ownership and rights associated with assets would create a complex matrix of interdependencies. Many of these may be of little

consequence at present but would become increasingly important as the processes of change are implemented or trigger points are reached.

### **3. Findings**

3.1 Summary findings from the action research were:

- Participation and evaluation of governance research applied to Fairbourne was extensive and helped to develop the current proposed governance model and ongoing evaluation of the PSB's role, both for Fairbourne and to address its role in providing oversight of the wider implications of climate change adaptation.
- Challenge came in the form of "what if" worst case scenarios, exploring how and who might be held to account if delivery of the Masterplan started to fragment at a cost to businesses, service providers, regulators and the community. Was a "best endeavours" approach through a FMF board, without terms of reference, appropriate to the scale of the problem and ensuing risks?
- How well prepared and informed was the Community Council to take on a representative role of the community and act as a voice on their behalf? Many of the tensions between FFC and Arthog CC have been reconciled and Gwynedd CC officers and members continued to play an active role in supporting the Community Council, disseminating information and participating in meetings.
- Ownership of the Masterplan would be critical to its success. Drafting a plan in isolation can sometimes feel easier and quicker, but fundamentally this plan must "belong" to the community rather than be something that was done to it. Each resident would have their own personal understanding of what it meant to them and how they might respond to it.
- Understanding infrastructure – getting to the bottom of just what infrastructure is present in Fairbourne, its managed and where the vulnerabilities lay in succession planning. This understanding would help to "pull" the providers into the Masterplan development process and

engage in analysing critical decision pathways that would be essential to the plan's success.

- Engagement of the socio-economic sectors (including local businesses) was slow and a range of efforts, including developing the socio-economic assessment, may have helped to target actions in the future.
- The complexity of decision pathways and how best to represent a great number of scenarios has been a topic of debate throughout the governance review. Successful formative learning will hopefully take this forward with organisations and individuals from all the key stakeholders participating and developing deeper understanding of how the many decision routes interact and need to align in order to deliver the Masterplan.
- Succession-planning becomes more critical the longer the project runs for. Discussions around reliance on small numbers of highly informed individuals, potentially within organisations for whom this work might only represent a small component of their overall responsibilities leaves a potentially fragile future for the project. Clearer understanding of the importance of sound organisational oversight and robust governance would be the best insurance policies against this. It is hoped that the ongoing work with the local Public Service Board and internally within and between the stakeholder organisations will help to reduce this highly significant risk.

#### **4. Lessons Learned**

- 4.1 For similar research projects in the future, the range of approaches taken combined independent evidence with individual and specific views, providing rich insights into the perceptions of residents and those stakeholders aiming to support them. As a critical friend it was important to get to know the community, but also to maintain impartiality and objectivity throughout. A lot of time was required for engagement and observation – face-to-face time and dialogue was essential.

- 4.2 In terms of lessons specifically for Fairbourne, at the point of reporting, FMF was still a collective with no formally established terms of reference. The overall governance review recommended that these were drafted and signed up to by all relevant parties to support clarity of roles and responsibilities. In tandem with this, the Masterplan needed greater visibility and, underpinned by an agreed engagement plan, the community as a whole still needed to be able to provide greater input and help to understand the complex and technically challenging factors at play. Utilities and infrastructure providers needed to better engage with the masterplanning process and the development of decision pathways. The same applies to social, health and welfare providers. Succession-planning is critical to the success of this project. One certainty over the lifespan of the Masterplan would be that organisations will change, people will move on and knowledge will evolve. The risk of too much reliance on a small number of people should be factored in to the success of the Masterplan.
- 4.3 Lessons could be applied more broadly, especially where SMP2 policies of no active intervention or managed realignment (or reviews of these policies) impact on communities or represent a shift from previous policy direction. In these circumstances, a closer examination of the processes and consequences around policy-setting and policy implementation should be undertaken to inform how to engage with these communities and wider stakeholders affected by these policies. Earlier published SMP engagement guidance should be reviewed to take account of this. Governance and decision-making has emerged as a key area of concern. The Fairbourne project has broken a great deal of new ground and learning has been continuously evolving. Whilst the SMP2 was the trigger for the change-management processes underway, the mandate went far wider than traditional coastal risk management and cut to the heart of the Well-being of Future Generations legislation, well-being planning and the role of PSBs. There should be further consideration of how PSBs can play an active role in the oversight and championing of climate change adaptation planning consistently across Wales.