

## **Neptune Coastline Campaign**

### **A Model for Coastal Protection and Management.**

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#### **Introduction**

The Neptune Coastline Campaign may be judged to be one of the most successful conservation programmes in the world in the last 50 years. The Neptune Coastline Campaign is run by the National Trust and it is valuable to understand something of this organisation before looking at the campaign itself.

#### **The National Trust**

The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, to give it its full title, was established in 1895. It is a charitable trust, wholly independent of Government and works in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The powers of the National Trust are however contained within a number of Acts of Parliament and most important amongst these is the power to declare land “inalienable”. This power, unique to the National Trust, imposes severe constraints on the state to compulsorily acquire land which has been declared inalienable. It does, however, impose the burden of permanent ownership; meaning the National Trust which cannot sell or mortgage the freehold of land which has been declared inalienable.

The central purpose of the National Trust is to “promote the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands ..... of beauty or historic interest and, as regards, lands, for the preservation (so far as practicable) of their natural aspect features and animal and plant life”. From its very first

years the key strategy of the National Trust has been protection through ownership and currently over 95% of National Trust expenditure (totalling approximately £200 million per year) is applied to the protection, access and interpretation of properties in its care. The National Trust now owns over 248,000 ha of land including 200 country houses and 965 kilometres of coast. The National Trust benefits from wide support in the community with 2.89 million paying members. Membership subscriptions contribute over £67 million per annum.

### **The Neptune Coastline Campaign**

The Neptune Coastline Campaign was launched in 1965 in a reaction to a widespread concern at the accelerating rate of loss of coast to pressures from commercial, tourism and housing developments. A survey by Reading University in 1965 identified over 1500 kilometres of coast as of the highest quality and at risk of degradation. The measure of quality was primarily driven by the natural and picturesque qualities of the landscape.

The Neptune Coastline Campaign was launched with the ambitious target of protecting these 1500 kilometres. In the 37 years since its launch, Neptune has raised over £40 million to purchase and manage coastline, resulting in over 970 kilometres now being protected. Freehold ownership accounts for 872 kilometres with the balance of 98 being protected by restrictive covenants, a legal instrument which prevents an owner carrying out certain specified damaging activities. The Neptune Coastline Campaign remains as relevant today as it was nearly 40 years ago. It has gripped the imagination of countless thousands of people as a task of enormous importance and value to this and future generations.

### **Attributes of the Neptune Coastline Campaign**

What are the key attributes that have enabled the Neptune Coastline Campaign to be successful and remain relevant?

#### **It is supported by a financially sound charity independent of Government**

By the time of the launch of the Neptune Coastline Campaign in 1965 the National Trust had been established for 70 years and had built a reputation as a financially responsible charity with a track record in good estate management.

#### **Coastline acquired by Neptune is declared inalienable**

the unique power of the National Trust to declare land inalienable and thus protect it from the compulsory acquisition by the state is of the greatest importance. It enables the Trust to offer “permanent” protection to land and ensures that the Trust is very prudent in its financial projections for the costs in managing property which is to be acquired. The Trust’s financial basis for land acquisitions assumes costs will rise significantly faster than income and that projected forward 50 years that income must still exceed costs.

### **Money goes where donors want it to go**

The Neptune Coastline Campaign covers the coasts of England, Wales and Northern Ireland but donors of funds, whether £1 or £1 million, are invited to say where they wish their money to be spent. In this way, the Neptune Coastline Campaign has a rather rough and ready democratic character, money being attracted to those parts of the coastline which are judged to be most in danger or most highly valued aesthetically.

### **Strategies for Acquisition of Coastline are set regionally within national policies.**

The National Trust has no power itself to compulsorily purchase or acquire important coastline and must acquire it either through gift or more commonly by purchasing land that comes on to the open market. The choices of when to acquire coast are limited by the available funds at any one time, but will be judged within the context of acquisition strategies which are formulated by the regional staff and voluntary committees of the National Trust. These strategies reflect the detailed knowledge and understanding of local and regional cultures, but are formulated within the context of a national strategy. This seeks to ensure that only coastline above a certain threshold of quality is acquired.

The development and implementation of acquisition strategies will take the following into account:

- That it is not enough to acquire merely a strip of coast (whether cliff, sand dune or marshland etc.) A sufficient scale of ownership must be sought in order to provide comprehensive protection and to enable integrated and sustainable management arrangements to be made. For example, in the West Penwith landscape in Cornwall, this has meant the Neptune Coastline Campaign acquiring up to 9 kilometres in-land from the coast in order to encompass the full extent of the historic and natural landscape.
- Acquisition will almost always be due to a combination of qualities of the land, but Neptune will always seek to provide free public access on foot to the property. Only in the most extreme cases of fragile historic or natural environments would access be denied altogether.
- A test that the National Trust imposes on itself is that acquisition and protection of coastline under the Neptune Coastline Campaign must bring measurable benefit and must achieve more than ownership by, say, a private individual would bring. This may seem self evident but in parts of the country where publicly funded land management regimes are already in place, the National Trust must rigorously test the additional public benefit that protection by the Neptune Coastline Campaign will bring.
- Coastal landscapes are almost by definition of a substantial scale. Acquisition strategies allow the full extent of these landscapes to be identified and allow the Neptune Coastline Campaign to react quickly to opportunities of land that comes on to the market. Often such coastline

would be acquired using Neptune Coastline Campaign funds alone, but partnership funding will always be sought from local authorities, grant giving trusts or nationally available grants.

**Strategies for Management are set locally and endorsed regionally within national policy frameworks.**

Management strategies for land protected by the Neptune Coastline Campaign are built on local knowledge and skills ensuring that local distinctiveness is respected and celebrated within national policies that promote, amongst others, sustainability and biodiversity.

Management of the agricultural component of coastal landscapes is a cornerstone of management. The coast no less than all landscapes in Britain have been moulded and managed by man. Sustainability therefore lies at the heart of the National Trust's management ethos and it will always seek to balance the economic and social needs of rural communities with protection of the natural and historic environment. Most coastal agricultural land is farmed by tenants within the framework of 5-10 year tenancies. However, successful agricultural tenancy arrangements will normally be continued beyond this, often for a lifetime. Management regimes will always seek to meet other community aspirations e.g. educational or cultural, as well as providing opportunities for furthering national policy initiatives such as lifelong learning.

Increasingly, the National Trust is developing closer partnership working with its agricultural tenants and has recently developed the concept of the "Whole Farm Plan" as an effective vehicle for sustainable management. This plan encompasses the environmental objectives of the National Trust and the economic and social objectives of the agricultural tenant.

The values of communities change as do the values of the National Trust. The Trust now creates and reviews in consultation with local communities "Statements of Significance" as a basis for setting the management objectives of areas of coast. These statements will reflect the scientific, aesthetic, cultural and community values of a place.

**Can Protection of Coasts through ownership by Charitable Trusts be Effective?**

Protection through ownership by a Charitable Trust combined with effective fiscal and regulatory policies at a national and European level, has proved in the case of the Neptune Coastline Campaign to be remarkably successful.

Amongst drawbacks that some see of ownership by charitable trusts are:

- Worries that charitable trusts are not democratic or accountable to the wider community
- That they are necessarily parochial in their interests and may ignore what are seen as legitimate concerns by the wider community interests
- That charitable trusts may be financially weak with bank accounts full of energy and commitment but often short of cash!

Charitable trust ownership can “add value”, but it is important that national and European policies and financial instruments are in place to encourage landowners, including charitable trusts, to provide the environmental “goods” that the market place cannot pay for.

### **Is the Neptune Coastal Campaign still relevant?**

The Campaign continues to receive enormous support. It is on target to raise £1.5 million through donations this year.

Acquisition and management strategies remain under regular review. Currently they are being adapted to reflect the inevitability of change and especially climate change in the coastal zone. The public message of the Neptune Coastline Campaign is protection against damaging change, but we are increasingly aware that protection does not mean prevention of change. Rather, the National Trust, through the Neptune Coastline Campaign, must manage the processes of change and negotiate with partners including local communities, what that means, including recognising climate change is likely to have a significant impact on soft coasts.

As well as protection of coasts by acquisition, the National Trust through its Neptune Coastline Campaign will increasingly be putting effort into influencing national and European policies; contributing to the debate as to how society should be managing change and its impact on coasts; seeking to turn competition between terrestrial coastal and marine interests to mutual advantage. The success of the Neptune Coastline Campaign means the National Trust has the advantage of a coastal resource of a significant scale and can contribute to future policy development by providing a test bed in partnership with others for managing change, testing techniques and developing innovative practices.