

BUILDING A FUTURE ON A CHANGING COAST

How one family is learning to live with coastal change

Still Southwold

Working with nature, not against it.



A PLACE SHAPED BY THE SEA

The Suffolk coast has never stood still.

For centuries the sea has reshaped Easton Bavents, swallowing fields, roads, homes and entire communities. Along this coastline, change is not an exception—it is a certainty.

Our family has lived with that reality for more than a century.

When my great-grandfather bought the Easton Bavents estate in the 1920s, it extended to around 371 acres. Since then, more than two-thirds of that land has been lost to the North Sea. Five family homes have disappeared, together with large areas of productive farmland.

Many people ask what it feels like to watch the landscape change so dramatically.

The answer is simple.

It is heartbreaking.

But it also forces you to think differently about the future.



CHOOSING ADAPTATION

Like many landowners on England's rapidly eroding coastline, we eventually faced a difficult reality.

The coastline would not be defended.

If we wanted future generations to remain here, we needed to find another way.

Eventually we realised we had been asking the wrong question.

Instead of asking how we could stop the sea, we began asking how we could build a future that could move with it.

How can we build a business that is designed to adapt as the coastline changes?

That question became the foundation of everything that followed.



A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Still Southwold was created around a simple principle.

Instead of building permanent structures designed to resist coastal erosion, we chose to create low-impact accommodation that could evolve alongside the landscape.

Every new project is designed with one assumption:

the coastline will continue to change.

Rather than fighting that reality, we have tried to embrace it.

Moveable buildings.

Light-touch development.

Careful siting.

Landscape-led design.

Buildings that can retreat inland as the cliffs retreat towards them.

Adaptation is no longer something that happens after a crisis.

It becomes part of the design from the very beginning.



MORE THAN A HOLIDAY

Still Southwold is not simply about providing beautiful places to stay.

It is about helping people reconnect with nature and understand a changing coastline.

Guests come for the peace, wildlife, big Suffolk skies and extraordinary sea views.

Many leave with something more.

They have experienced, first-hand, a landscape that is continually evolving.

For many visitors, it is their first real appreciation that climate adaptation is not simply about the future.

It is already happening.



LIVING WITH CHANGE

Running a business on an eroding coastline requires a different mindset.

Every investment must consider the future.

Buildings.

Landscaping.

Infrastructure.

Access.

Utilities.

Nothing can be designed on the assumption that today's coastline will still exist in fifty years' time.

Adaptation is not a single project.

It is an ongoing process of learning, planning and responding.



A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE

In 2026 an important milestone was reached when planning permission was granted for one of our cabins to continue moving inland as the coastline changes. Rather than relying on temporary permissions, the approval recognises that carefully designed accommodation can relocate inland as erosion continues—a planning approach intended to support long-term adaptation.

For us, this represented something much wider than a planning decision.

It demonstrated that adaptation can be planned positively rather than simply reacting to inevitable loss.



“Our third stay here at The Watch Room and it's as perfect as ever. Thank you for another wonderfully peaceful few days.”

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Our experience has taught us that successful adaptation depends on more than innovative design.

It also requires:

- long-term thinking;
- planning systems that can respond to changing coastlines;
- collaboration between organisations;
- confidence to invest despite uncertainty; and
- a willingness to see coastal change as something that can be managed rather than simply feared.

Communities affected by coastal erosion do not simply need protection.

They need practical ways to adapt.



LOOKING AHEAD

Climate change means many more coastal communities around the UK will face similar challenges.

There is no single solution.

But we believe our experience demonstrates that adaptation can be positive.

It can support businesses.

It can create new opportunities.

It can help communities remain connected to the places they love.

Most importantly, it can provide hope.



OUR STORY CONTINUES

Every winter storms reshape this coastline.

Every year another piece of land disappears.

In many places that story ends with loss.

We hope ours shows another possibility.

That places can adapt.

That businesses can evolve.

That landscapes can remain extraordinary.

And that living with nature, rather than constantly trying to resist it, can create something worth passing on.

We hope our experience can contribute to a wider conversation about how Britain plans, designs and invests for a changing coast.

If our story encourages others to think differently about adaptation, then the lessons learned at Easton Bavents may prove valuable far beyond our own shoreline.



STILL SOUTHWOLD

Still Southwold is a collection of carefully designed coastal retreats overlooking the North Sea near Southwold, Suffolk.

Created in response to one of Britain's fastest-eroding coastlines, the business is founded on a simple belief:

Working with nature, not against it.

We believe the future of Britain's changing coastline lies not in resisting every change, but in helping people and businesses adapt successfully.

If you would like to discuss coastal adaptation, planning or our experience at Easton Bavents we'd be delighted to hear from you.

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