

**From:** [REDACTED]  
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I attach the written version of my presentation to the meeting on Monday 22 July.

Best wishes

Rosalind Coward

Graveney Marshes: An important public amenity. Professor Rosalind Coward

This representation focuses on the threat to a valued local amenity.

I am speaking as a Whitstable resident and it's important to remember this development would have a hugely detrimental effect, not just on the village of Graveney but also on the surrounding areas of Whitstable and Faversham.

Graveney marshes – beautiful, atmospheric, wildlife-rich Graveney marshes - are considered by Whitstable residents to be part of their area's identity, one powerful reason why people want to live there and visit there. Whitstable defines itself as a town surrounded by open spaces, not just any old open spaces but the special valued landscape and ecologically rich Graveney marshes. The large number of 'Save Graveney Marshes' posters in the windows show how strongly residents feel the threat to 'their' amenity.

Like others from the area, I walk in every season along the beach past Seasalter to Graveney marshes relishing their tranquillity and evocative beauty. Marshes hold a hold a special allure for many. Maybe we instinctively understand what ecology now teaches us, that coastal marshes have a vital role in natural climate solutions, absorbing water and storing carbon, "blue carbon" as it's called. Maybe it's because marshes are special places for interaction with the rich wildlife they attract. Graveney Marshes always offers thrilling encounters. It's by far the best place for bird watching in the region. In summer there are skylarks in the fields, wheatears on the sea wall, and reed buntings in the reeds. In winter there are guaranteed sightings of marsh harriers over the fields. Sometimes there's a sighting of the even rarer hen harriers. In winter too there are flocks of lapwing, plovers and large groups of Brent geese feeding and resting in the fields while the tide is high. These are all

threatened species, difficult to see elsewhere, and seeing them makes my heart sing.

Planning discourse describes a public amenity as ‘a positive element or elements that contribute to the overall character or enjoyment of an area. For example, open land, trees, historic buildings and the inter-relationship between them, or less tangible factors such as tranquillity.’ This area – its landscape, its wildlife, its special atmosphere - is just such an amenity for Faversham and Whitstable. It’s a jewel in the crown of the Saxon Shore way too , advertised to ramblers as offering, not far from London, an open landscape, wide skies and a rare feeling of remoteness and tranquillity. At night it’s dark, one of the few areas still free from light pollution.

An amenity like this has long term physical and mental health benefits. Walking and outdoor pursuits are forms of free exercise, beneficial for general physical health. But access to nature and tranquillity is also restorative for mental health . This latter is now well document by therapists, naturalists and writers. Indeed, Carol Donaldson in her lovely book, *On the Marshes*, documents the recovery from a breakdown walking in this very landscape.

If this area is developed, instead of openness, encounters with wildlife, a sense of tranquillity, and a place to restore health, the public will find an industrialised landscape. As far as the eye can see, occupying the footprint of the town of Faversham, there will be a lid of panels more suitable for the Mohave desert. Something people love and value, an amenity which benefits them and will benefit future generations, will be lost forever.

Does this Inspection have any way of valuing Graveney Marshes’ amenity value? Do it have a way of measuring what this area means to its visitors and the benefits that brings them? Is there a measure for the grief and distress which will be caused if it is destroyed? Has the long-term cost to well-being been factored in?

Surely this must be included because the government itself has now included this dimension in their 25 year plan for the environment. <sup>1</sup>In May this year (2019) they promised: ‘We will conserve and enhance the beauty of our natural environment, and make sure it can be enjoyed, used by and cared for by everyone. We will do this by:

- safeguarding and enhancing the beauty of our natural scenery and improving its environmental value while being sensitive to considerations of its heritage.
- making sure that there are high quality, accessible, natural spaces close to where people live and work, particularly in urban areas, and encouraging more people to spend time in them to benefit their health and wellbeing.’

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>