

# Different words might mean a different outcome for us

## Peter Trudgill



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Norfolk is falling into the sea. We're losing large bits of the eastern part of our county every winter.

Unfortunately, our national leaders don't seem to care much about this. They have singled out Norfolk as a place they're not committed to defending. Our county may be collapsing into the North Sea; but that's just too bad.

I wonder if their attitude has something to do with the words they use. Tony Blair and David Cameron were both very keen to defend what they called our "nation" by sending troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. They spent vast sums on these expeditions because, they said, they made our "nation" safer – even if it wasn't necessarily obvious to everybody exactly how it did that.

Tragically, however, they and most other politicians in government seem to have no interest at all in defending the actual material fabric of this place where we live, right here. Maybe it would help if governments would start thinking of this as our "country" – instead of this abstraction "the nation". They might then be more focused on defending us here at home. In fact, it might be even better if, instead of using either of these originally



■ Norfolk is falling into the sea yet our national leaders don't seem to care - they give this fact away with the words they use, says Peter Trudgill.

French words, they could go back to Old English and start thinking of this place as our "land".

Interestingly, one spokesman told us why the government didn't want to try to save eastern Norfolk. It was another word: saving us would lack "viability". Viability is rather a new word, but it comes from the older form "viable", which was originally a French word derived from "vie", life. It was initially used of newborn infants, meaning "capable of life"; and started being used in a more generalised sense in the 19th century. Well, obviously coastal Norfolk won't be "capable of life" if the government

chooses not to spend any money to help us – because what our leaders seem to mean by "lacking in viability" is "not worth spending money on".

If the Dutch hadn't wanted to defend the Netherlands because it wasn't viable, they wouldn't have any land left by now, and therefore no country, let alone a nation. But they are defending it; and our politicians could certainly protect us in the same way if they wanted to. But apparently Norfolk is not important enough.

I wonder how viable Bayswater and Chipping Norton would be if they were on the edge of a cliff.