**Belle Toute: Background information**

Belle Toute lighthouse is a famous landmark on the top of the cliffs at Beachy Head, on the South coast of England.

Belle Toute was bought in 1996 by Mark and Louise Roberts because they ‘fell in love with it’. It has wonderful sea views, particularly from the top of the lighthouse, and was a historic property with real charm. The house cost them £9000.

Would you buy this house?

It was soon obvious that the lighthouse was threatened with cliff collapse because of the nature of the cliff it stood at the top of. Although the chalk is a relatively resistant rock, it is prone to sudden collapse as water and frost penetrates the rock and creates large cracks into which more water can then penetrate.

In 1999, there was a major cliff collapse at Beachy Head. This made the newspapers and TV, and brought a renewed threat to the lighthouse, which was now in even greater danger of structural damage as the cliff edge was getting ever nearer.

The couple decided to investigate the possibility of moving the whole lighthouse backwards away from the cliff edge. An engineering firm explained that they could move the whole lighthouse back from the edge in one piece, rather than having to knock it down and rebuild it.

This would cost the couple £350,000, and they had only bought it for £9000. What would you do at this point?

The whole structure was moved back from the cliffs by 17 metres in 1999 by the engineering firm. The Roberts family put the lighthouse up for sale in 2007.

Would you buy this house?

The erosion of the cliff has continued since the lighthouse was moved back, and a series of wet winters and very dry summers has caused the erosion to speed up.

Belle Toute was put up for sale for £850,000, although it was thought that the lighthouse would be at the edge of the cliffs again in around 20 years time.

Would you buy this house?

The lighthouse was finally sold in 2008 for around £500,000, and the plan was to turn it into a bed and breakfast. It is also planned to be opened up to the public, so the next time that you are down on the South Coast, why not go and take a look, and see if Belle Toute is still standing.

Useful weblinks
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beachy_Head
http://lighthouse-news.com/2008/06/02/belle-Toute-lighthouse-to-be-bed-and-breakfast/
http://www.brighton.ac.uk/env/research/earth_systems/agru/beachy_head.htm - a striking image of the cliff collapse