

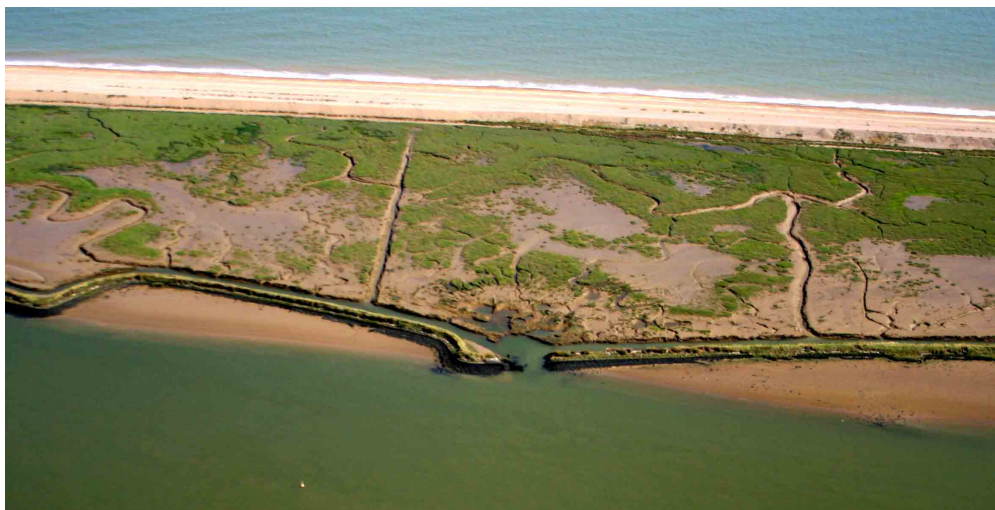
THE ALDE & ORE ASSOCIATION

Registered Charity No. 1064789



The Association exists to preserve and protect for the public benefit, the Alde and Ore River and the Butley Creek and their banks from Shingle Street to their tidal limits and such of the land adjoining them or upstream as may be considered to affect them, together with the features of beauty and or historic or public interest in that area.

RDC BULLETIN NO. 3 October 2007



Lantern Marshes Breach – photo courtesy Janet Harber September 2007

Much has happened since the last Bulletin. The need for action now to plan for the future flood protection of our part of Suffolk has become very clear with the recent release of the draft strategy for the Blyth. An article on this subject is being prepared for the Association's next Newsletter.

This Bulletin reports on:

- The meeting with Mike Steen to discuss the survey carried out of the river walls in June
- A meeting with Paul Woodcock Environment Agency's Regional Director held on 3 October
- A meeting with Professor Ken Pye, the Association's environmental consultant, held on 15 October
- Dr Sam Duby's presentation on his experimental work to create a natural hard river wall on the Alde and Ore

1. Meeting with Mike Steen

This took place on 18 June and followed the submission of our survey of the river walls, carried out quickly to fit in with the EA's timetable for works for the coming year. We identified nine points where minor repairs were needed to prevent serious deterioration. While the format, presentation and content of our coordinators' reports were well received, none of the sites, he told us, were eligible for repair work under the conditions laid down by DEFRA (see Environment Agency Policy-Appendix 1 attached).

It is clear that unless a disaster is likely to occur no work will be carried out until the strategy for the Alde and Ore is agreed. A stitch in time is not part of the EA's thinking.

2. Meeting with Paul Woodcock

This meeting was requested by the Environment Agency and took place in Orford on 3 October. It was attended by David Andren, Sir Edward Greenwell and Richard Marson. Paul Woodcock brought Charlie Beardall Environment Agency's Area Manager with him.

He told us that the Alde and Ore strategy and the results of the Thorpeness to Hollesley Strategy Study will not now be released before the late summer/early autumn 2008.

We then discussed setting up a small fund to support any approved work carried out by landowners on their walls. This proposal, we were told was not feasible under current regulations, however the idea of a protocol under which minor works could be carried was worth developing. This had been started in Essex but had stalled due to the number of local authorities involved.

Subsequently it was agreed that the RDC should work with Charlie Beardall to carry this forward, on the basis that minor (to be defined) maintenance works might be dealt with by landowners while 'major' works would remain the responsibility of the EA.

We understand, however, that a meeting has taken place at national level with the EA, Natural England, the CLA and NFU to discuss what can be done locally to maintain flood defences if the Environment Agency will not do so. Their meeting concluded with a decision the EA should draft a protocol on similar lines to that we had already discussed. Paul Woodcock was not aware of this when we met. His later decision that the RDC should work with Charlie Beardall to develop a local protocol will obviously require us to watch closely the progress of these national negotiations.

Having spoken to Charlie Beardall he has agreed to draft a position paper on the protocol project which might go to Natural England and SCDC to set out broadly the terms under which maintenance might be carried out by landowners. He will be ready to meet before Christmas, however he also says that until we have an approved strategy which conforms with the habitat directive there will not be a useable document under which we might maintain our river walls.

3. Meeting with Ken Pye on 15 October

The A&O Committee asked Professor Ken Pye (Kenneth Pye Associates Ltd – Scientific Research, Consultancy and Investigations) to update them on the current situation on both the estuary and coast. The main points made were the following:

- Either side of Aldeburgh Martello Tower are of major concern as potential sites for a breach in the sea defences
- Lantern Marsh – small waves are causing slumping of the sea wall. The River wall is in a poor state and will not last more than a few years. Due to the breach in the river wall any resistance from grass growing has been lost as now mud covers the shingle
- Stoney Ditch – potential hazard should the tide get in through overtopping
- Aldeburgh Town Marsh wall must be defended because of the risks of flooding as in 1953
- The coast line remains very dynamic with some erosion and some accretion – most of the marshland in the A&O is too low to sustain salt marsh
- At present rate of erosion there is only 10-15 years before the Lighthouse falls
- With lack of funding and since some changes were inevitable the big issue will be to identify works which can be financed through local funding and through involving river users and local businesses

4. Dr Sam DUBY's presentation to the Alde and Ore Association on 13 October

Sam presented a report on the research he is carrying out on the Alde to mimic the natural process of coral type formation through carbon sequestration. Very simply, an electric current is passed through a wire mesh or chicken wire which causes mineral deposits to form around it and act like concrete. It creates a dense, tough, natural and self-healing structure that will hopefully be used to slow or prevent the loss of valuable coastal land due to erosion. This is very much cutting edge technology, it will be cheap to produce and could potentially do wonders for flood defences everywhere. The rate of deposit takes place quickest when the wire is constantly covered with water, but will work in areas exposed at low tide at a slower rate.

The process, even if it fulfils its early exciting promise, is likely to take some years before it becomes widely available. Sam is looking for further sites to trial in the estuary so if you have an area that might benefit please let us know. In discussion it was agreed a key problem was how to secure commercial backing.

4. EA Papers Attached

For your information and in case anyone has not had sight of it we attach an updated version of DEFRA's 2004 position statement on withdrawal of maintenance from uneconomic sea (and river) defences circulated at the most recent meeting of the local regional flood defence committee.

The implementations of the policies outlined in their paper are dependent on the production of agreed strategies for the future of the rivers and the coastline. These are not expected before late summer 2008.

In discussion at the RFDC meeting it was suggested that six months was too short a period for giving notice of an intention to withdraw maintenance. Although, as on the Blyth and at Dunwich, the Environment Agency might say that they might try to maintain sea and river defences, if the costs of repairing a breach appeared greater than the benefits, they reserve the right to abandon those defences they had agreed to maintain while developing strategies or which were not sustainable in the longer term.

6. Next RDC Meeting

The River Defence Committee hopes to recruit a small group of leaders who will join the Committee with a view to identifying a strategy which will be outlined at the RDC's first annual meeting. We plan to arrange this in the New Year prior to the Association's Annual General Meeting.

7. Summary

The RDC believes that these activities, combined with the support of the local members of the Alde and Ore Association provide clear evidence, if any were needed, that any proposal for the future management of our rivers will have to withstand a very vigorous examination.

RICHARD MARSON
Chairman of Sub-Committee
29 October 2007