

THE ALDE & ORE ASSOCIATION

Newsletter No. 43
Spring 2015



Charity No.
1154583

To preserve and protect for the public benefit the Alde, Ore and Butley Creek rivers 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 of historic or public interest in the area.

Reinforcing the shingle • New intertidal habitats • Keeping walls in good shape • David Andren's gift • Upgrading our website

The Chairman's message

So far it has been a quiet winter with a few minor surges but tide levels in the river have been high, at least partly because of medium term tidal cycles. Along the sea shoreline parallel to the river, the winter has seen ever changing shingle profiles, even sandy stretches and, up towards Aldeburgh town, the shingle has been shaped into cusps and curves and a series of shingle benches.

The sea wall defences at the centre of our estuary are

in process of being planned and funds sought. An old 1950s postcard shows a time when the sea wall was far more denuded of shingle than it is even now. It serves to remind that our coastline varies and changes all the time, sometimes not worrying us much, at others causing great concern.

In the last *Newsletter* there were photographs of the changing profile of the shore below the sea wall near Slaughden in May and September. All winter the

Spring clean: Alison Andrews, our chairman, and Vicki Bingham, in charge of ferry publicity, clean out the ferrymen's hut. See page 5



Don't forget...

The Annual General Meeting of the Alde & Ore Association takes place at the Thorpeness Country Club on 11th April at 10.30am for an 11am start.

shingle and sand has stayed around the base of that slipway, moving in some storms. We have to keep an eye on our coastline and river, be aware of changes and be ready to act on the basis of facts. To this end we are keeping in close contact with Environment Agency.

The last year has seen a new riverscape at Hazlewood Marshes. It proved to be very costly to restore the walls to keep the sea out. No government money was forthcoming as no properties were flooded but the Environment Agency did contribute some funding for a wall at the base of the properties to help protect from future inundation. The Suffolk Wildlife Trust's priority, as major landowner, is now building up a range of intertidal habitats rather than freshwater habitats which is no longer an option.

The Marshes are emerging as a haven of interest to a great many more birds and some salt marsh is building up around the edge. To the east a neighbouring landowner has protected good pasture with a new wall while the golf course has been reconfigured to cope with inundations around the lower lying holes. Associated British Ports, interested in salt marshes, is funding monitoring the development of the intertidal habitat.

So we now have a far wider area open to the river, emptying and filling with each tide but new islands



Fit for purpose

Tim Beach, Snape Parish Councillor who sits on the AOEP, at the river wall at Snape which has now been restored following the flood damage of the 2013 surge. See also page 9.

and scrapes are to be built, with Suffolk Wildlife Trust working with Natural England, perhaps a mini Minsmere will develop. SWT also intends to restore the path to the Hosking hide, so hopefully it will be an area to be enjoyed again to the full.

The AOEP estuary strategy plans envisage keeping all other walls in good shape so as to protect the integrity of the estuary, except where there might be a deliberate change near the mouth to take the pressure off the estuary. The Association will continue to play its part to preserve the estuary as far as possible.

On keeping the estuary in good heart, we have just received an interim payment of a large gift from the estate of our former Chairman, the late David Andren, whose will expressed the wish that this would encourage others to help finance actions which will preserve the unique charm of the Estuary and surrounding countryside which visiting experts have described as 'a North Sea gem' and in the hope that these funds can be used to improve the river defences north and south of Orford (Flood Compartment 4). The trustees are considering how to use the generous gift most effectively.

This coming year we have three very different outings planned, as well as the Barbecue. There is to be a long walk, a wildlife walk and a visit to the Pagodas on Orfordness which have recently become listed buildings. By the way, 2015 sees the 20th anniversary of the National Trust land on Orfordness being open to the public.

We hope to upgrade the website. The current one has served us well but needs now to move with the times and technologies. With a more flexible one it may be easier for better and faster moving

Alde-Ore Local Economic Study



Final Report
prepared for

The Alde & Ore Association

28th February 2014

The Alde-Ore Local Economic Study, the Association's economic survey of the area undertaken in summer 2013, found that the five main reasons people like the river and its surrounds are the scenery, tranquillity, countryside, beauty, and peace. For sailors the five top words were sailing, unspoilt, beauty, river and peace.

communication, providing more regular updates on events, plans and repairs.

As you will see from the articles in this *Newsletter*, there is a lot happening and you, the members, are important to providing the strength of the Association to work for the preservation of the area. You are also needed to help the committee know about anything up and down the length of our long estuary which may need attention or support. So if something is of concern, please let us know.

It remains for me to hope to see many of you at the Annual General Meeting on Saturday, 11th April, and

to wish you all an excellent summer.

Alison Andrews

PS On 17th March 2015 Geoffrey Smeed observed 13 seals resting together on the bank of the River Butley between the mouth and Boyton Dock. Is this a record?

Tim Pike

The Association was very sorry to lose Tim Pike, a very active member of the ferry team, who sadly died from cancer late last year.

Slaughden sea wall and the shore: update on protection



The shingle store at the Martello Tower. Some 7-8000 tonnes are being stockpiled for sea defence projects.

The loss of shingle off the sea wall near the Aldeburgh Yacht Club and south of Martello has caused much concern. The Association, both separately and inside the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership, the Aldeburgh Yacht Club and Aldeburgh Town Council have together been lobbying Environment Agency (EA) for action.

At the time of the Alde and Ore Futures Exercise consultation in 2011 it was thought the sea wall was good for at least 30 years. The depredations of two heavy winters have made the situation more urgent but as local memories remind us, there can be serious losses which repair themselves naturally. Nevertheless EA has been working on the area over the last year.

Last spring and again in the autumn the EA replenished the shingle south of Martello. The shingle

wall, some 600 metres south of Martello, which had reduced to a thin footpath in width, has been fully restored to a width to cope with the big shingle carrying lorries. This renewed shingle wall has stayed in good shape all winter.

The EA has been working on plans for short and more long term works, particularly on the sea wall north of Martello. As a preparatory stage, toward the end of 2014 the EA completed successful stockpiling of approximately 7-8000 tonnes of shingle around the Martello Tower. It will be used to locally recharge beach levels possibly linked to further works. The stockpiling was done last autumn as there is a limitation through a licence on when and how much material can be taken from the Ness, so this had to be done in advance of the main works programme.



Next, in the early part of this year the EA has been making the most of the opportunity of the exposure of the sea wall joints due to low beach levels to maximise the useful life of this asset through appropriate maintenance work. There have been contractors on site undertaking sea wall joint removal and replacement. The joint fillings looked like tar and were eroding but have now been replaced by more durable mastic.

Preparing plans not only involves design, sourcing of materials and finding what can be considerable sums of money but EA has also to ensure other issues, such as Marine Management Organisation licence requirements and environmental impact assessments/mitigation, are fulfilled. But to do this EA needs to have the outline/final design and other statutory assessments in place. This means a tricky chicken and egg scenario that has to be managed. EA aims to deliver the works locally using the local design team in Ipswich and also to use local internal field teams, all with a view to keeping delivery costs to a minimum.

For the longer term, high level options are being progressed for a major capital scheme but further data is required before any possible options could be considered. This larger capital works project could cost several million pounds. Given Government funding policy such a project will need locally-sourced as well as government funding. EA will be

consulting with the Alde & Ore Estuary Partnership and the Association as the plans develop.

At the same time, EA remains watchful of any threatening weather patterns and can continue to respond accordingly. In December the EA mended damage to the shingle slopes on the AYC side of the sea wall within a few days of the over washing. When rough weather is expected, the EA local team will be out assessing for any damage and will clearly be in a position to respond should the need arise. If any members become aware of any issues please get in touch with EA or via the Association or AYC.

We are trying to keep in close touch with EA so that when there are plans for discussion and action all local interests can be involved as much as possible.

Members may also be interested in what is happening in relation to breaches to the south. The National Trust has reported that, subject to consents, hopefully temporary repairs to seal breach in Lower Lantern Marsh will have started in March, allowing the site to be drained and further investigations to take place.

All being well, permanent works will be put in place later this year. The National Trust also hopes to start works on repairs to Stoney Ditch embankments and Pig Pail Sluice in May or early June, providing the necessary consents can be obtained.

The Association needs you

Planning Adviser

Do you enjoy keeping an eye on planning matters?

Do you like to know what is going on around the estuary?

The Association needs a trustee who can take on the role of **Planning Adviser**. We need someone, or a team, who can regularly check on planning applications made to Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC) and pick out those that might be seen from or impact on the Alde and Ore Estuary.

These have then to be considered and the committee advised and consulted on what position, if any, the Association might take bearing in mind its aim to preserve and protect the area. This work also involves drafting responses to be submitted to SCDC including the necessary references to planning provisions and law.

If you have expertise in this area, which is mostly likely if you have professional experience as an architect, chartered surveyor, lawyer or planner, please consider joining us.

For more information please contact Alison Andrews on aldeblackburn@aol.com

Newsletter Editor

The *Newsletter* is one of the highlights of the Alde & Ore Association. Our current *Newsletter* Editor has steered through a large number of twice-yearly editions. We would like a willing volunteer with publishing experience to take on producing the editions for a few years.

The committee is largely responsible for gathering the contents of the *Newsletter* from among themselves and some members. The *Newsletter* Editor's task is to put it all into a highly readable and engaging magazine.

If you think that you might enjoy this challenge, the work mostly takes place in February/early March and October, please contact Alison Andrews, aldeblackburn@aol.com or to get a real idea of what is involved first talk to Derek Bingham.

Messing about on the river

Behind the scenes a great deal of hard work goes into maintaining the landing stages of the Butley ferry and the ferry itself. Here Roy Truman, who is also a ferryman, works on jetty maintenance.



The Butley Ferry

The Butley Ferry had a very successful season last year which we hope to emulate, or even improve, this coming season.

Last year between Easter and the end of September, over every weekend and Bank Holiday, we had 56 days of running the Ferry and we transported 864 adults, 57 children and 353 bicycles. August was the busiest month, shortly followed by May. We had three blank days when no walkers braved the elements to find the patiently waiting ferryman, and one day cancelled due to the weather.

Partly due to the cycle of present high tides and other factors, the jetties and paths to them across the saltings are not in as good condition as we would like, so in the three months before Easter there have been quite a few working parties by the volunteer ferrymen to put our house in order - this on top of the annual scraping and painting of the boat. I would like to thank all the ferrymen for all their work both in the working parties and during the season. It would not operate without them.

This year ferry passengers will be given a post card featuring an evocative watercolour of the ferry. We are very grateful to Jamie Bruce Lockhart who has produced four lovely pictures and this year's postcard, the production of which has

been paid for by a generous anonymous sponsor, is shown here. One of the ferrymen, Maggie Scorer, is about to set off bicycling around the UK Coastline with her dog Oscar: we wish her well and will welcome her back for her ferry duties in September. Her very good web is www.dogontour.co.uk which I would encourage you to look at.

The season starts on 4th April, Easter Saturday, and finishes on 27th September. We look forward to seeing you and your friends on the river. Check times on line www.aldeandore.org, ferryman@butleyferry.org or the ferryman's telephone number is 07913 672499.

Tim Dudgeon

The ferry postcard, courtesy of Jamie Bruce Lockhart.



Alde & Ore Association walks 2015

The programme of walks for 2015 explores different aspects of our estuary and rivers: walking from Glemham to Snape in May to enjoy the Alde valley; the history of Orfordness in July; and, in September, the wildlife of the estuary at the new reserve at Stanny House Farm, Iken.

The walk on Friday, 15th May, is some five miles from Glemham to Snape, starting in the grounds of Glemham Hall by kind permission of Philip and Raewyn Hope-Cobbold and following the Alde from just below the Farnham Bridge to where it is joined by the Ore.

We will then follow the Alde down to Snape, crossing the Fromus at Gromford on the way and ending at Marsh Cottage, Snape, for a light lunch. Cars can be left at either Glemham or Snape and the missionaries/cannibals problem of having the right number of cars at each end and unscrambling them after lunch will be arranged nearer the time.

On Friday, 17th July, we are visiting Orfordness where the National Trust will give an introduction to the Ness and a guided tour of the recently-listed pagodas which are not normally open to the public. Depending on the weather, we will then walk for a bring-your-own picnic to the sea beach close to the Lighthouse where, if we make enough noise, we may attract the porpoises that investigated the Lighthouse Concert last year.

Crossing will be by the National Trust ferry and you are free to roam on the Ness, returning by the ferry which runs until 5pm. The total walk to pagodas, picnic area and back is some five miles; the National Trust can provide transport if required but spaces will be limited.

The September walk on Friday 11th will be a guided tour of the new reserve at Stanny House Farm, Iken, led by Rodney West, the manager of the Centre. The walk will last for some two hours, looking at the flora and fauna of our estuary and the range of habitats, woodland, grassland, light sand and clay and the river shore. Lunch will be provided in the Centre at the end of the walk.

To summarise, a light lunch will be included with the May and September walks and bring your own picnic for the Orfordness visit. We regret that dogs cannot come on the Orfordness or Stanny House Farm walks but are welcome on the May walk (on leads within the grounds of Glemham Hall).

Booking forms and further details were included with the AGM documents, will be available at the AGM and can be downloaded from the Association website. If you have any queries, please email walks@graylink.co.uk. Places on all of the walks are limited and particularly the transport on Orfordness so do book your place as soon as possible.

John Grayburn

Dates for your diary 2015

Saturday, 11th April Annual General Meeting, 11am at Thorpeness Country Club, coffee from 10.30am, with a guest speaker on forecasting surges and storm surges

Thursday, 7th May Final report from the archaeologists on the results of the four Archaeological Digs at Barbers Point, 6.30 pm in the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh (organised by the Aldeburgh and District Local History Society with Touching the Tide) Free entry, no need to book

Friday, 15th May * Association walk in the middle Alde

Friday, 17th July * Visit to the pagodas on Orfordness

Sunday, 30th August * Annual Barbecue, Round Hill, Aldeburgh IP15 5PG, 1pm

Friday, 11th September * Wildlife reserve at Stanny House Farm, Iken. Guided tour beginning at 10.30 am with lunch afterwards

*Please book a place on these events using forms sent with Annual General Meeting Papers or available online at www.aldeandore.org



The Association's walks, organised by John Grayburn, are always fun, interesting and invariably well attended. This year three are planned but you'll need to book.

The pagodas (TOP) on the Ness are now listed buildings. Those who visited them on one of the Association's walks, in July 2010, are given the inside story.



Bentwaters: outcome of the planning application

The Planning Application for the Bentwaters Parks was decided upon after a long meeting of the Suffolk Coast and District Development Management Committee on 13th November 2014. Dr Tim Dudgeon, trustee, kindly represented the Alde & Ore Association.

The application covered the full range of actions at the Park dating from 2010 but the Association only challenged the proposals that related to flying submitted in 2014. The central point made by the Association was that, with Bentwaters being only 2.2 miles from the nearest part of the Alde and Ore Estuary, the pollution arising from aircraft noise would be detrimental to the tranquillity of the estuary which is one of its most notable features. This damage could affect businesses, farming and tourism, the considerable wildlife for which the area is subject to numerous environmental designations, as well as residents.

The outcome was that the proposed amounts of flying were confirmed but with specified conditions. The overall amount of flying is capped at 960 aircraft movements a year and no more than 40 aircraft movements a week which are not part of a flying display (air show). No take-offs or landings may take place between 21.00 and 07.00 hours.

The conditions are (numbering as in the Development Committee minutes):

19 Flying at the site (which means taking off and landing) shall be limited to aircraft categorised as: Historic, classic or vintage aircraft, or Piston-engined General Aviation aircraft, or All other aircraft below a maximum take-off weight of 15 tonnes (15,000kgs).

Unless in an emergency, where any aircraft movement shall be notified to the local planning authority within 24 hours of its landing at the site and within 48 hours details shall be provided to the local planning authority of the timetable for its departure from the site and the arrangements for its storage and supervision before departure.

Reason: for the precise control of the type of aircraft using the site.

20 Operational aircraft at the site shall either:
Be kept in a secured hangar when not attended, or
Be monitored by the site's existing 24 hour security if not in a secured hangar and not attended.

Reason: for the safe and secure operation of aircraft activities.

21 No more than 960 aircraft movements a year and no more than 40 aircraft movements a week which are not part of a flying display (air show).

Reason: In the interest of maintaining tranquillity within the AONB and residential amenity.

22 Time of Flying – No take offs or landings between 2100 and 0700 at the site. Except in the cases of emergency as described in this decision notice.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity.

23 Site not to be used as a flying school, parachuting or aerobatics over the site.

Reason: In the interest of maintaining tranquillity within the AONB and residential amenity.

24 Maintenance of a flight log for all take offs and landings and a list of operational aircraft which are stored on the site shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) on the 1st April on an annual basis. The flight log shall also be made available at any other time upon formal written request from the LPA.

Reason: for the precise monitoring of the number annual air traffic movements and the type of aircraft using the site.

25 No aircraft engaged in the business of commercial air freight shall be based on the site nor shall they land at the site for the purposes of commercial air freight.

Reason: In the interest of maintaining tranquillity within the AONB and residential amenity.

26 Dates of any flying display to be notified to the Local Planning Authority six months in advance of any event taking place.

Reason: In the interest of maintaining tranquillity within the AONB residential amenity and wildlife.

The conditions have been set out here so that members are aware of what is allowed and what is not. Monitoring conditions have been set. It will be necessary to ensure that monitoring is carried out so that, should the flying become more disturbing over time, there will be evidence to tighten up on controls. Certainly many of the reasons for the conditions relate to maintaining tranquillity and reducing disturbance of the AONB. We shall have to be vigilant.

Alde & Ore Association

Are you interested in joining the committee of the Alde & Ore Association? If so, please contact our Chairman, Alison Andrews, on aldeblackburn@aol.com. Our thanks go to Alison Andrews, Amanda Bettinson, Vicki Bingham and John Grayburn for photographs used in this *Newsletter*.

Contributions should be sent to the editor, Derek Bingham, Ferry Corner Cottage, Ferry Road, Sudbourne, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 2HD. Telephone 01394 450759. Email thetwobinghams@btinternet.com

The Alde & Ore Estuary Partnership



Planning for the future

There are times when the cogs seem to move very slowly but hopefully the Partnership is now easing towards a culmination of several years' work. There are three strands of work taxing us at the moment, the Estuary Plan, Enabling Development to raise funds, and the Internal Drainage Board work to trigger government flood defence funds. These all interlink, are quite complex, require statutory agreement at every turn and frustratingly can take many months to get the required consents.

The main activity last year – and by the looks of it this year too – has been the preparation of the Estuary Plan to explain and justify the plans to bring all river defences up to the target standard to withstand over topping in a 1 in 200 year surge in the year 2050.

This has been an enormous piece of work, with the strategy team (Sir Edward Greenwell Bt, Alison Andrews and Mandy Bettinson) pulling together many strands to give the whole picture on our defences and justify the reasons for our need to continue defending our community.

Suffolk County Council started the Plan's Sustainability Appraisal in July 2014 to check that it meets all the regulations (*eg* for maintenance of intertidal habitat) against the Habitat, EU Water Framework and other Directives with which we have to comply. This is an iterative process and this may lead us to making various changes to the Plan.

However, the Sustainability Appraisal is now waiting for the results of the remodelling of water flows, flood risks, river morphology and sediment changes since the 2013 December surge, including the breaching of Hazlewood Marshes. This work required the collection of new data on water flow that was completed at the end of last year.

The remodelling which now follows is necessary to check whether the estuary river defence plans, including those for Snape, need changing. This was due to be completed by the end of March. The reassessments will also feed into the major scheme plans for Snape, on which there will be discussion later in the year.

Nevertheless, it is hoped the County Council's initial 'Scoping Report' for the Appraisal, itemising issues for statutory consultation by Natural England, the Environment Agency and English Heritage, will be concluded by May. The Partnership will then be ready to go out to full public consultation with parishes and the community in what now looks like a very busy summer. The Estuary Plan should finally be submitted for endorsement by all the regulatory bodies at the end of the year or early in 2016. It is a very ambitious and tight timetable.

Alongside this the enabling development programme, led by Sir Edward, chairman of the AOEP, is to fund some of the local contribution. The Landscape Partnership, independent consultants, were appointed in December

in response to a District Council suggestion that some independent advice was required to help support the enabling development concept. A tentative date for applying for the first phase of outline planning permissions could be in the autumn. Brian Johnson (retired Association trustee) sits on the Partnership as a Parish Council representative. As an architect he is closely involved in the enabling development programme, as is the Alde and Ore Estuary Trust, which will be the 'landowner' at point of site sale.

The final strand to all this is the application the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) is preparing for the Environment Agency to trigger whatever government flood defence funding we can obtain. These funds will probably only be a minority of the £7-10million we anticipate will be needed.

Once this whole jigsaw of work is agreed, some enabling development sites are sold and money is in the bank, we can finally start the programme of bringing all estuary walls up to our flood defence standard.

Funding for maintenance in the years to come will be the next big issue, and we could argue that, had more been done in the past, we would not need such a gargantuan effort now. Inevitably, local contributions will be required from 'all those who benefit' – in a word 'us', that is all of us who live, work in, visit and enjoy the area.

This has yet to be fully discussed, but small contributions could potentially be raised from a wide range of sources, such as car parking, hotel and restaurant bills and holiday rentals. Innovative schemes can also play a part: for example The Pump Street Bakery in Orford already donates 20p per loaf sold to their own Orford fund. Please contact me with any other original ideas you can dream up.

Present work on the walls

Snape: the final portion of the north Snape wall will be repaired as soon as the marsh has dried out, as waterlogged ground makes it impossible to transport the clay to the wall. We were relieved and encouraged that the wall, now built to an improved standard and more resilient to overtopping, withstood the surge tide on 10th January.

Tide Gauge: the Environment Agency has installed a new tide gauge at Snape Bridge and will eventually allow tide heights to be viewed on the EA website from the comfort of your armchair (valuable when surge tides are at midnight).

Slaughden Coastal Defences: the EA will shortly start emergency work on 160 metres of coastal defences in front of the Yacht Club. More long term high level options are being progressed for a major capital scheme but the EA needs further tidal data before any possible options could be fully considered.

Amanda Bettinson, Partnership Secretary
www.aoep.co.uk

NAO Report on flood-risk management

The National Audit Office's latest report in November 2014 on flood-risk management¹ gives Defra and the Environment Agency a slightly hollow pat on the back for being particularly efficient in the return on investment it has recently achieved and wonders if in the long run it is simply storing up trouble as the current level of investment in maintenance of river and sea walls may be too low.

The NAO's role is to monitor government expenditure and report on whether it represents value for money for the taxpayer. Total funding for flood risk management in 2013-14 was £606.2m of which £315m (52%) was on capital projects and £291m (48%) on maintenance and other revenue items. Leaving aside the special emergency funds made available by the government to local authorities to clear up last year's damage after the floods, the report reveals that in cash terms government funding declined by 18% for capital projects and 10% for maintenance.

Autumn and winter 2013-14 were, as we all well remember, periods of unusually heavy rain and widespread flooding. Indeed it was the wettest period in the south of England for 250 years. The government responded by temporarily increasing the non-emergency funding – it voted an additional £35m for each of 2014-15 and 2015-16 intended to restore the amount of spending cut over the past four years in cash terms, which was good news.

In real terms the NAO found this still represented a 10% decline in overall spending on flood defences. The government, prompted by pictures of the disastrous scenes of the flooded Somerset Levels and other emergency areas, made available an additional £200m of emergency aid for mopping-up and making repairs after the flooding but as this was emergency funding to repair damage, it should not be taken into account as part of the government's normal annual expenditure on flood defences. If governments are forced by floods into spending these sums of money on a regular basis one would have thought it would prompt greater concerns about the resilience of the flood defences.

The government's 2012 Climate Change Risk Assessment reported that climate change, with wetter winters and rising sea levels, will put an ever greater burden on our defences. Indeed the Environment Agency noted that if the current level of protection is to be maintained, then it will be necessary to increase funding by an average of £20 million every year, plus inflation, until 2035. There is no evidence the government plans to take this advice.

It is implied in the NAO Report that there have been deferrals or cuts in projects which might otherwise have been undertaken but for the pressure to cut

government expenditure. On capital funding, the Report notes that over the past three years 'efficiencies' have involved a 'saving' of £44 million. The NAO concluded that this implied that many projects have been 'deprioritised'. On the maintenance side, the Report notes that flood-risk projects have won funding from central government where on average the cost-benefit ratio is 1 to 9.5 which is in fact much tougher than the normal Treasury Green Book standard of 1 to 8.

In short, significantly tougher standards are being imposed on flood-defence projects than on other types of project. There is no evidence in the Report that works are being carried out at less cost than in the past, although it is always possible that this might be the case, as the Alde & Ore Estuary Partnership has long contended. However, the general tenor of the Report implies the savings made to date are nevertheless cuts, not greater operational efficiencies.

The Report notes that more partnership funding has been attracted than Defra ever expected, some £140 million in the past three years as against the highest forecast of £125 million. However, it seems that three quarters of the partnership funds are coming from other public sector sources such as local authorities and only 25% from private sources, so it is surprising that the partnership funding approach is said to be 'progressing well' as presumably this funding is quite simply at the expense of other local services. What all this means, suggests the NAO, is that flood-defence expenditure is in fact being cut at a time when there is a case for spending substantially more to maintain flood defence assets as representing good longterm value for money.

The Report accepts that Defra and the Environment Agency should not pick projects on the basis of the highest returns as that would risk directing all the money to just a few projects and 'delivering very high standards of protection in the most populated areas'. Indeed the NAO notes that the cost-benefit thresholds set by the Environment Agency ensure that 'limited funding is not exhausted on a few high-value projects and can be allocated across a wider range of smaller-value projects'.

But the fact remains that the Environment Agency is nevertheless achieving a significantly better cost-benefit ratio on its flood defence projects than the Treasury Green Book rules prescribe, or indeed as the Environment Agency even originally anticipated, and this implies that the Environment Agency should be spending more not less.

Whilst the NAO does not go beyond its remit by suggesting that more central government money needs to be put in the pot, it nevertheless observes that 'current spending is insufficient to meet many of the

maintenance needs the Environment Agency has identified for its assets'. In particular, the NAO notes that 'in the areas where maintenance has been deprioritised – typically, where there is a low number of homes – this will increase the danger of asset conditions degrading, so increasing flood risk'.

In such areas, the NAO fears the Environment Agency will be faced with awkward decisions on whether to replace the defences much earlier than would have been the case if properly maintained or indeed to simply abandon them. The NAO therefore strongly recommends that the Environment Agency should better ensure that its maintenance programme protects long-term value for money.

It foresees that where defences break down,

community and public pressures will inevitably influence the decisions that are made and warns that the *ad hoc* responses which may result are, in the NAO's experience, never such good value for money as sustained maintenance. What this implies, and probably would have been said explicitly if it were within the NAO's remit, is that more central government funding needs to be provided for maintenance now if value for money on flood defences is to be achieved in the long-term.

Colin Chamberlain

¹National Audit Office, Strategic flood risk management, House of Commons 780, Session 2014-15, 5 November 2015; see also National Audit Office, Flood Risk Management in England, House of Commons 1521, Session 2010-12, 28th October 2011

Suffolk Coast Against Retreat (SCAR)

The SCAR AGM was chaired by Lord Deben, as SCAR's Patron, on 7th March 2015 with Sir Philip Dilley, new Chairman of the Environment Agency (EA), as guest speaker.

The meeting was interesting from several angles, most notably the long list of vulnerable parts along the Suffolk coast needing monitoring and repair – the Alde and Ore is far from alone – and the approach of the new EA Chairman, which may signal changes over the next few years.

Councillor Andy Smith (SCDC) was congratulated on his work in changing government policy to allow tax relief on landowner's contributions to flood defences.

The Chairman's report noted that SCAR has been actively involved with several areas of threat up and down the Suffolk coast. Of particular concern are:

Erosion at Benacre. Several acres per annum have been lost in recent years.

Covehithe, although this has been stable for a couple of years.

The Minsmere Levels and sluice, a vulnerable low spot on the coast.

EDF proposals at Sizewell, although funding difficulties at Hinckley Point are pushing Sizewell C further into the future.

Sea defences at Thorpeness have had some success but more work is likely to be needed.

The sea wall at Slaughden has suffered depredation during the last two winters and works are proposed by the EA – no clear indication of what or when at this stage.

The new Bawdsey Coastal Partnership has been formed to focus on the vulnerable area between Shingle St and Bawdsey.

The East Lane defences have been extended. More works are required but the funding formula indicates no further central government budget due.

The beach at Bawdsey has disappeared, threatening Bawdsey cliff and Manor and the Anglia One proposals to bring wind generated power ashore at this spot are a concern.

The Felixstowe Ferry golf course coast line is particularly vulnerable.

In addition the three major estuaries of the Blythe, Alde/Ore and Deben are developing estuary plans that involve works to river walls, salt marsh and some hard spots.

Sir Philip Dilley has been in post since September 2014, following in the footsteps of Lord Smith. This signals a new approach for the EA as he is an engineer as opposed to a career politician. Previously he was chairman of Arup, Consulting Engineers with a strong reputation for high quality people and work. Interestingly, Arup has a similar number of staff to the EA and a turnover similar to the EA budget.

He promised a commercial engineer's approach to his new role, *ie* precision and commerciality. He believes the EA needs to be more precise with its proposals – that is it should give a clearer understanding of when an EA project will be delivered as well as exactly what. The new government policy of committing to a six-year capital programme is helpful in this context. He also promised to develop the EA's collaborative approach to their local partners and public – this last point was welcomed by the audience who have appreciated a new collaborative style from EA during recent years.

Generally, the audience was impressed by Sir Philip's approach to his new role.

Keith Martin

Are higher tides here to stay?

We are all familiar with the twice daily tides and the twice monthly cycle of spring and neap tides that are most extreme in the spring and autumn equinoxes. But we have seen much higher tides in this last year.

This is not sea level rise. Of course we have this with isostatic re-balancing following the retreat of the ice sheet in the Ice Age which is adding to the sea level in the south east. There is also sea level rise resulting from climate change or global warming and together these will take sea level up about 0.6m by the end of this century, some 4 to 6mm each year. This cannot account for the higher levels at present.

High tides are predominantly influenced by the distance between the moon and the sun but the distance between the sun and the earth and the alignment of the sun, moon and earth also play a role. There are more than 100 cyclic components affecting tides and it takes 18½ years for tides to completely repeat themselves – something that was new to me!


It seems we are at the peak of an 18½ year cycle in the moon's elliptical orbit which brings the moon as close as it ever can be to the earth and so increases its gravitational pull. In itself this makes for stronger tides. But a further factor is that this year is a rare astrological alignment in the phase in cycle of the earth going around the sun where at times the earth and the sun with the moon between them are in a

straight line. These several coinciding cyclical patterns mean that this year we are in a phase when the combined forces pull water most strongly, so producing tides that are above the general run we expect. The most extreme effect will be seen at the spring and autumn equinoxes because of the zero declination of the sun.

One of the three largest of these higher tides was estimated to occur around 21st February and the other two around 21st March and 23rd September. The height of the tide at Aldeburgh this March was expected to be 3.20 metres, compared with other spring tide heights varying from 2.74 metres to 3.19 metres, with most in the 2.90s metre range.

The higher tides do not themselves give rise to surges or possible flooding. Surges are a function of the meteorological conditions and fortunately the coincidence of particular winds and low pressures do not happen that often. Should such conditions occur at the time of a super tide, then it would magnify that effect. Even so, if winds die down rather than being gale force as in 1953, the smoother waters reduce the likelihood of flooding than if there were 2ft waves.

So the very high tides we are seeing at present, often covering the saltings right up to the river walls, should fall back as the moon moves away in its elliptical cycle over the next year.



Late winter, looking downriver from Orford: the very high tides should fall back as the moon moves away in its elliptical cycle over the coming year.