

ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

FINAL MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF THE ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP HELD ON THURSDAY 1 APRIL 2021 AT 6.30PM BY ZOOM

PRESENT:

Nominated representatives

Tim Beach (TB) Chairman

Andrew Reid (AR)

Peter Palmer (PP)

Ben Coulter (BC)

Council

Peter McGinity (PMcG)

Jeremy Hinves (JH)

Frances Barnwell (FB) Vice Chairman

Alison Andrews (AA)

Jane Skepper (JS)

Cllr. Snape Parish Council

Cllr. Suffolk County Council

Cllr. Aldeburgh TC

repr. Butley, Capel St Andrew and Wantisden Parish

Chair Chillesford Parish Meeting

Chairman Cllr Iken PC

Cllr. Orford and Gedgrave Parish Council

Alde and Ore Association

IDB Board Member

Chris Gill (CG)

Edward Greenwell (EG)

Treasurer

IDB alternate

ADVISERS/ATTENDEES:

David Kemp (DK)

Jane Maxim (JM)

AOET

Environment Agency (EA)

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 5

AGENDA

1. **Apologies:** Ray Herring Cllr. East Suffolk Council (ESC), T-J Haworth-Culf Cllr ESC, Andrew Cassy Cllr. Boyton PC, Niels Peterson Cllr Tunstall Parish Council, Bill Parker Sudbourne Parish Council, Harry Young Business Representative, Giles Bloomfield East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board (ESIDB) Ed Boyle Natural England

2. **Declarations of interest**

Representatives who had not yet done so were asked to complete the annual Register of Representatives' Interests declaration of interest form and return it to the Hon. Secretary **Action: some Representatives**

3. **Minutes of the meeting on 28 January 2021**

These were agreed without amendment. (proposer PMcG, seconder EG)

4. **Matters arising from the meeting on 28 January 2021 not otherwise on the agenda - None**

5. **IDB update on the Outline Business Case submission.**

The Chairman said that against the background of a recent Community Update about the Iken Waste Investigation which the Environment Agency had asked to be shared with others in the community, there was concern about the delay in the approval of the Estuary flood defence construction plan. He said that as people have been interviewed under caution, the discussion had to be circumspect on details but there could be an open discussion on the principles He asked Janey Skepper to bring the AOCP up to date.

JS read out an account on behalf of the ESIDB. Briefly, the chain of events began following the storm surge of 2013 when the ESIDB assisted with recovery works. This included using clay from local building developments. Following that and after open discussion at meeting with all officers and members in attendance from 2016, clay, which was donated free from nearby housing developments, was diverted from landfill and placed in Iken in readiness to help build up the height of the walls and for emergency repairs. This was an innovative use of material for the Alde and Ore project which was openly discussed at meetings with all officers and members in attendance. In June 2018 the IDB had stopped the supply and in August the Environment Agency ordered it formally to stop. The Environment Agency investigation had been going on

since then. The IDB had had an independent test conducted which showed that the deposits were pure clay. The EA had recently had its own testing done. Meanwhile, since 2018 the Outline Business Case for the rebuilding of the estuary walls was prepared by the ESIDB and submitted to the Environment Agency: after it had passed all the technical examinations, it was put in hold because of concerns about the overall economic viability of the plan should the clay under investigation not be allowed to be used. IDB considered that this concern arose from a misreading of the application that imported material was required whereas the plan was that where-ever possible clay needed would be won locally from adjacent fields and should any imported material be needed the cost was already built into the contingency budget. JS concluded the IDB report that the principles of using good quality materials for embankment improvements or stockpiles for emergency repairs should be applauded as the clay a valuable commodity. The investigation was a matter for EA and the IDB hoped it could be resolved as soon as possible for all parties concerned.

The Chair said that one of the reasons for current discussion was that EA asked him as Chairman of AOCF to circulate the Community Update and that it was slightly ambiguous or open to interpretation. Also, bits were reported wrongly in the EADT and caused some concern, so there was a need to get something out in public that reassures people. This was still a viable project with or without the IDB and without or without the clay: it was important to get that message out. Bearing in mind partnership was made up of councils- Suffolk County Council which was the lead local flood authority, and the District and Parish Councils, the estuary communities were entitled to reflect that back to EA and the importance of speed of concluding the investigation.

In discussion it was agreed that a clear statement should be made. Points included that it was extraordinary that this has been ongoing for 2 ½ years, the glacial process had left us in the estuary unprotected for several more winters. The press report prompted by the EA Update was causing concern locally and affecting confidence, as was the delay, because the longer the start of the works was delayed the longer peoples' homes, businesses and even lives would be at risk, and this was even more concerning for the lower estuary where construction was already several years on down the line; that EA could be asked how they prioritised their investigations and how in this case, delay of which could potentially affect many people and lives, featured in EA's priorities. Further, the idea of an investigation with not even a target date for conclusion was, in the view of an experienced lawyer, very unusual.

In response to a suggestion to engage the local MP, it was said that she had been closely engaged over the last year or more and had been helpful in pressing the case and she would continue to be involved.

JM said that the Trust had pressed EA firmly for an indication of when the investigation might be over on several occasions but had been rebutted every time. TB said he had a similar experience in that the response to his last letter had been extraordinary implying in terms that even by asking about progress was delaying the investigation.

AR said that it was important to use this moment where EA made a statement, of a kind, to make our statement and to regard this as something to make public and residents aware of. He was representing the SCC which was the lead flood authority, and he would be prepared to say that it is a matter of concern that this project is being delayed irrespective of the reasons. It was noted that Ray Herring, District Councillor had also sent in an email that now was the time for a robust response.

TB suggested that based on what JS had stated, AOCF and AOET (probably IDB) would have a conversation in the early part of next week to decide on a form of wording that reflects material and concerns expressed in the meeting. This would be cleared quickly within AOCF. It would include making the point that while the investigation is under way and not concluded it leaves at risk hundreds of households and hundreds of businesses. He said that an approach by letter to the EA as a community and elected representatives across this community it was justified and necessary to ask about the delay. The letter to the EA would not be about the innards of the investigation but about risks and timelines asking EA what the options are so they are proactive with us.

As a way of putting pressure on the EA, the Judicial Review route was suggested. TB said it was quite a complicated and tortuous process and potentially expensive but proposed that as someone within AOCF had volunteered to look at it at no cost to try and take advice, that was worthwhile doing in parallel as an option, the advice should be sought so when and if meet again can make proper and informed decision whether that is a viable option. This was agreed.

The scope for using freedom of information request was suggested. JS reported that those made so far, had been firmly rebutted on the ground that there was an ongoing investigation. It was concluded that route might

not be helpful at the moment.

Action: Chair to lead with AOET

6. Communications- Report back from AOCB Comms Group. Update:

i. AA reported that progress was being made updating the AOCB website, page by page in and making it more attractive and interesting and easier to put in news and information in an accessible way. If anyone had ideas of what might be put on to the website or changed, she would like to hear from them. **Also, the AOCB needs a Comms leader and help on the Comms Group, so volunteers would be welcome.**

ii. The leaflet discussed last time would be very useful in providing a full background to the river defence work and was being held until the delay to the Business Case was resolved. Comments would still be welcome.

Action: comments to Hon. Sec.

7. Working with Infrastructure/utilities bodies

The Chair has had some discussion with CPE about reviving the very positive discussion of September 2019 meeting hosted by Therese Coffey with the infrastructure bodies and the LEP to persuade them to work with the estuary partners and contribute to the work and building the river walls. For information to AOCB to keep all up to date, he was proposing to revisit that, in anticipation of getting the successful bid, to try to get them back into the room and re-engage them. Karen Thomas (CPE) was happy to help us do that.

8. Finance

i. The Chair said that on funding for the Partnership from the local authority/EA, action was in hand to revive a former fund for estuary partnerships to provide some money to keep a small running fund, mostly for promotion and media expenses. DK said that money had already been allocated by RFCC and now it was only a matter of transferring it. The previous route for doing so was not open but he had found a way via a collaboration agreement and hoped that lawyers would clear that shortly. TB thanked DK for his help with this.

ii. EG had just that morning had a reply from the bank about a cheque to pass the former AOEP money to the AOCB, so a way forward had been found.

9. Any other business:

i. Jane Maxim wanted to inform people that AOET may be going to organise another flotilla from Aldeburgh to Orford on Sunday 4 July, and asked people to put a tentative date in their diaries- it would be a fun thing to do.

ii. Charles Croydon (AONB volunteer) had asked that attention be drawn to a newly published piece of research in the Deben (Saltmarsh Research on the River Deben by Richard Steward and Robin Whittle). The interesting point is that they found that saltmarshes were accreting at a rate which was keeping pace with rising sea levels. Saltmarshes are a vital piece of flood defence. AA said that within the Alde and Ore Estuary there had been two surveys, 5 and 20 or so years ago and saltmarshes were something the Monitoring Group was keeping an eye on. It was noted that the report could be put on the website for all to see.

10. Dates of Next meetings

The next meeting would be on either **Thursday 8 July 2021 at 6.30pm**, whether by Zoom or in person would depend on covid rules at that time.

AA 5 April 2021 Approved at meeting on 8 July 2021