

ALDE AND ORE ESTUARY PLAN ANNEXE – Situation report : spring 2024

The purpose of this situation report is to set out:-

- The current arrangements of the Alde and Ore Community Partnership (AOCP), now responsible for the Estuary Plan**
- Review what elements of the Estuary Plan have changed**
- What the Plan is achieving,**
- The work in collaboration with East Suffolk Water Management Board (ESWMB) and the Alde & Ore Estuary Trust (AOET) in their roles and how the roll- out of the Plan is being funded, and**
- Details of the funding work of the AOET.**

CONTEXT AND CURRENT GOVERNANCE

The Alde and Ore Estuary Plan was initiated by the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership (AOEP) in 2012. The creation of the Plan was collaborative and involved substantial consultation with all the involved communities and relevant organisations.

The Plan was formally endorsed by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council (now East Suffolk) and the Eastern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) in 2016 and it was agreed (and recorded in the Plan) that it should be subject of a full formal ten year review in 2026.

The AOEP completed its initial function of producing the Estuary Plan and establishing the means by which it is to be delivered. It therefore agreed to form a successor partnership, the AOCP representing the community and acting as its voice. Implementation of the Plan being taken forward by the East Suffolk Water Management Board in its role as a Risk Management Authority (RMA) while funding arrangements, other than those obtained from government sources are being led by the AOET. info@aoetrust.org.

The AOEP was dissolved in December 2019 and in its place the AOCP was established as a voluntary, unincorporated, community association.

The Partnership is not a flood defence authority. It consults with the relevant parties and advocates for its communities, but does not have any statutory powers.

The Partnership now comprises representatives nominated by each of the following:-

- a. One representative from each Town Council, Parish Council or Parish Meeting wholly or partly within the flood area, namely

Aldeburgh, Boyton, Friston ,Butley, Capel St Andrew and Wantisden, Chillesford, Hollesley, Iken, Orford and Gedgrave, Snape, Sudbourne ,Tunstall

The representative nominated may, but need not, be a parish councillor.

- b. Two councillors or representatives nominated by the East Suffolk District Council
- c. One councillor or representative nominated by Suffolk County Council
- d. One representative nominated by The East Suffolk Water Management Board
- e. One representative nominated by the Alde and Ore Association
- f. One representative nominated by the local business community

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PARTNERSHIP ARE:-

- a. To provide representation and a voice for the local community and act as guardian of the Estuary Plan, in relation to its implementation and any further development, enhancement or alteration of the estuary flood defence strategy and any related activities set out in the Plan or otherwise approved from time to time.
- b. To engage with the relevant statutory and funding bodies so as to facilitate good and comprehensive channels of communications with local residents and stakeholders with an interest in or affected by the implementation of the Estuary Plan.

CARRYING OUT THE OBJECTIVES

In order to carry out the Objectives, the Partnership will:-

- a. Establish and maintain communications channels to provide timely and relevant information and feedback with the communities affected.
- b. Work with the relevant statutory authorities and funding bodies to progress the Objectives. Officers from such bodies will be invited to attend meetings in an advisory capacity as necessary.
- c. Review progress of the works and seek answers or actions where necessary on behalf of the communities affected.
- d. Review responsibilities set out in the Plan but not included in the programme of works and decide on future action in the light of any review's conclusions.
- e. Where modifications are required, work in consultation with the relevant statutory and funding bodies to assist in identifying appropriate and affordable steps for the protection of local communities and the houses, land, businesses, heritage assets and environmental considerations including wildlife affected by potential flooding from the Alde/Ore estuary.
- f. Where significant change becomes necessary, convene a meeting of the relevant statutory and funding bodies to decide on a strategy, propose the lead party or group to take matters forward, and modify the Plan if necessary. Changes will be put to the Partnership for approval.
- g. Adopt such policies and procedures as may be necessary for the effective operation of the Partnership.

THE ESTUARY PLAN - THE REVIEW

The AOCPP formally agreed in 2020 that one of its roles was to act as guardian for the Plan and to ensure it remained a relevant document. At the AOCPP meeting in June 2023 following the approval of the outline business case for Phase 1 (the Upper Estuary) it was agreed that, as the Plan had been created almost 10 years previously, that there were areas which needed some level of interim review and updating. These included issues such as finance, governance mechanisms and the current available technical and costing information to enable the Plan to continue as a live document. It was resolved therefore to create a group from the Partnership to consider the Plan to ensure it remained fit for purpose and for the AOCPP to note and flag any significant amendment or change to the Plan. This annex is intended to reflect that review.

The overall concept of the Plan, of delivering robust and consistent flood protection and resilience along the whole estuary is a principle which remains unchanged; however, a number of issues were recognised as having been subject of significant change, including :-

- Some of the detailed work on particular flood cells in the estuary for which the Plan set out options should be reviewed in conjunction with the submission of the Outline Business Case

(OBC) and related detailed engineering work for Phase 2 (Lower Estuary) to ensure the model principles remain applicable and appropriate

- Costings figures and available funding streams have changed considerably, not solely because of inflation, but also to reflect new guidance in particular relating to river defence works and significant changes to the Central Government guidance on funding and infrastructure investment returns.
- Similarly some of the initial sections on funding have benefited from review and appropriate amendment as the project has progressed to reflect the changes referenced above. It is fair to reflect that although inflation has, and will continue to, add headline costs, the changes in guidance have offered a number of additional opportunities for funding and added to the recognised environmental benefits and opportunities of the project
- At the time of the original drafting of the Plan the AOEP was to lead on raising funding but that now lies with the AOET, which seeks to fill the gap between government grants and the total amount needed for the project.
- Specifically there was reference in the original Plan to Enabling Development as a potential means of creating a finance stream. Enabling Development as a means of funding the work was formally withdrawn in 2019 and is therefore no longer part of the plan to raise funding for the project.

WHAT THE PLAN IS DOING

THE FACTS

- Over 1,000 properties are to be better protected under the Estuary Plan from the risk of flooding. These include over 750 residential properties and nearly 300 non-residential properties.
- Revenue generated by leisure and tourism exceeds £100 million per annum, creating many jobs.
- The tidal flood defence frontage is 44 kilometres long and provides access to 101 kilometres of public and permissive paths as well as internationally designated wildlife habitats.
- 59 fresh water aquifers irrigate over 2,630 hectares of vegetable and high value crops vital for nationally important food security.
- 3,335 hectares of tidal plain arable and grazing marshes of national importance would be lost.
- A number of roads, sewerage treatment plants and electricity substations in the flood plain will be protected.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITIES

Over the last twelve years volunteers have worked with the EA, Natural England (NE) and others, including the local authorities, to try to make this necessary and important project a reality. One of the key outputs of their work was the Estuary Plan which was endorsed in 2016 at District and County level and from the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC). This Plan was supported by all key statutory bodies and is now a material consideration within East Suffolk Coastal planning authority and recognised within the latest Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) update. The information about the SMP is now available on line via the new national SMP explorer tool, launched in 2024 www.gov.uk/government/news/smp-explorer-digital (SMP 7 units ALB14.3 and 14.4, and ORF 15.1 and 15.2)

In particular the preferred wishes of the communities for the resilience design was a key input into the successful submission of the Upper Estuary Outline Business case to the EA by the East Suffolk Water Management Board (ESWMB). In the 7 years since the creation of the Estuary Plan, the desire of the communities to provide a future for the estuary which is both resilient and adaptable has not changed. In its submission of the Upper Estuary Outline Business Case, the ESWMB ensured the wishes of the communities were at the forefront of the design.

Some information that lies within the existing Estuary Plan is routinely being updated as the Plan is implemented to take account of more recent information: the number and type of properties, the project costs and the economic case as well as fundraising initiatives. The AOCPC reviewed and updated the Estuary Plan in early 2024. The communities continue to be engaged through the AOCPC which has a representative from each town and parish at risk from flooding, as well as from Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council.

Whilst as a Partnership we are delighted with the positive outcome of the Upper Estuary for Phase 1 approval of the whole Estuary Project in 2023 suffered from lengthy delays which has had a detrimental effect on the total costs of the project. The delay arose partly due to an EA investigation into charges relating to a clay stockpile at Iken. Fortunately, the issue has now been de-coupled from consideration of the business case. Neither the AOCPC nor the Trust is party to any of these charges though we do hope that the outcome takes into account the importance of the use of this material in wall improvement work and its potential emergency use should we have a significant storm surge, leading to flooding. The estuary communities would arguably be unnecessarily penalised if this important initiative to upgrade flood defences was not progressed as speedily as possible.

The wishes of the communities could not be more aligned with the stated aims of the Environment Agency; and have been and continue to be the driving force for this project. These are:-

The EA's stated corporate strategy is that *"by 2025 we will have created more climate resilient places and infrastructure, by ensuring the nation is prepared for flooding, coastal change and drought*

- *by 2025 we will be a stronger leader on climate adaptation and resilience, encouraging others to act now on the climate emergency and invest in adaptation*
- *by 2025 we will be ready for bigger, more frequent incidents and will support those at risk to be more resilient"*

THE ISSUE OF COASTAL SQUEEZE

Saltmarsh is already present in the Alde and Ore estuary and is essential to the make-up of a fully functioning estuarine system. It provides a natural flood mitigation service by reducing and damping down wave action which erodes tidal defences over time. However, there is a potential conflict when wall embankments are raised in the estuary. This may impact saltmarsh health should sea level rise

outpace and hinder the ability for the saltmarsh to trap sediment and rise out of the water which keeps the system in balance. The threat to saltmarsh is known as coastal squeeze and is recognised by the EA, as the operating authority of existing defences, and NE as the environmental regulator. The Alde and Ore estuary coastal zone is therefore subject to robust statutory surveying and monitoring and importantly includes a community commitment of ongoing visual surveys coordinated by the AOCP in collaboration with Natural England and the Environment Agency. We therefore, do not anticipate that coastal squeeze will be a concern that cannot be managed throughout the project by the partnership.

THE ROLE OF THE ALDE AND ORE ESTUARY TRUST

The AOET raises funds needed to fill any gap left by the level of government funding to enhance and upgrade the flood defences in the Alde and Ore estuary which will provide medium to long term flood resilience for local communities. They are the charity responsible for fundraising to enable preparation and submission of the Outline Business Cases to the Environment Agency (EA), and then for raising enough money to make up the shortfall between awards from central and local government and the costs of the project. To this end they have been financing the East Suffolk Water Management Board (ESWMB), (formerly the East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board (ESIDB), to enable them to apply for government grants. In early 2023 the ESWMB was, granted £11.1 million for this project work through a government grant from the EA and local levy funding from the RFCC. And now, work on the Upper Estuary has started.

However, more money is needed to secure the future of the local communities along the whole of the Alde, Ore and Butley rivers. The resilience of the embankment improvements in the Upper Estuary is dependent on the Lower Estuary upgrade works being undertaken as a part of the overall project. The existing low defences and geography of the narrow floodplain bounded by high ground, pose limited resistance to extreme tidal surge waters progressing up the estuary. Without Lower Estuary upgrades, the down river flood cells drown out before the peak surge level is realised, causing peak water to progress all the way to Snape Village at a much higher level than if constrained by improved Lower Estuary defences. With Whole Estuary work completed, overtopping is expected to be equitable at peak flows into the floodplain and so reducing the overall water height within the system.

THE ROLE OF THE EAST SUFFOLK WATER MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Trust finances the project team working at the ESWMB. The ESWMB successfully presented to government a Business Case for grant funding to enable work in the Upper Estuary. This document followed the detailed process stipulated by the EA, which had to have both technical and economic approval and was peer reviewed. The government requires 'economic value' evaluations for various factors such as property, agriculture, and archaeology, calculated using their own guidance. And this was the basis for the grant. After accepting the business case, the EA announced a grant of £11.1 million in January 2023 for Phase 1, the Upper Estuary. This includes £3 million from the RFCC local levy funding. Work for the whole estuary, will be a 7-to-8-year programme.

The ESWMB have now started the preparatory work, such as habitat surveying and have begun the detailed design. They plan to start construction in 2024. Work is also due to start on Lower Estuary funding applications. The local area EA are supporting this stage with a grant award of £99k to enable the preparation of a Business Case. The Trust will, if necessary, award additional finance to make sure the Business Case is completed and submitted. The current estimates for the Lower Estuary suggest that £10 million will be available from the EA for Phase 2. This leaves a funding gap of around £20 million. The Trust continues to work to bridge this gap.

FUNDING THE SOLUTION

The flood defence upgrade will be funded by a combination of funds from central and local government, a public works loan funded by landowners, a legacy from David Andren (a local resident who was key to the initiation of the Estuary Plan). These will be augmented by amounts raised by the Trust from both individual donors and charitable trusts. The Upper Estuary upgrade is being carried out first, ensuring that no property will be put at any greater risk of flooding because of the works. This conforms to EA regulations. The ESWMB and the local communities through the AOCP would naturally like to progress this work as soon as possible. However, the proposed programme of works for the whole estuary will require significant funding and evidence of donations received or to be received is an important factor when seeking government funds.

Economics: Every £1 invested in the Lower Estuary flood defence upgrades benefits the local economy by over £4 (as adjusted for Net Present Value) over the next 25 years, because homes and businesses in each town and village, farmland and fresh water reserves and underground aquifers, along the whole estuary will be protected. This is a positive return on investment for both the local and UK economy.

Enjoyment: Many people take pleasure in this beautiful environment. Everything including accessibility along the extensive network of footpaths, to bird watching and sailing will continue safely, thanks to this work. The internationally renowned concert hall at Snape Maltings will be protected. The Maltings buildings have recently been granted Grade II* status by the Department for Digital, Media, Culture & Sport on the advice of Historic England. This is excellent news for both the local and UK economy as it attracts artists and audiences from all over the world.

Health and wellbeing: Protection of current enjoyable activities and the increased inclusive access to the walls for pushchairs and mobility vehicles will have a positive impact on both physical and mental health. On 1 July 2022 the UK Health and Security Agency published guidance 'Flooding and health: assessment and management of public mental health'. This guidance forcefully presents the case for the imperative to reduce flood risk on physical and mental wellbeing.

Environment: The estuary lies within the National Landscape's Suffolk Coast & Heaths (formerly called Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)). It is also a wetland site of international importance (RAMSAR convention), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Natura 2000 Special Protection Area. The whole estuary is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and has a number of individual wild life sites and reserves.

FUNDRAISING: THE WORK OF THE ALDE AND ORE ESTUARY TRUST

WHAT THE AOET DOES WITH DONATIONS

The Trust's strategy continues to be focused on giving financial grants to the ESWMB. The ESWMB are an approved Risk Management Authority who can therefore win Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management-Grant in Aid (FCERM-GIA/FDZIA) from the EA. This, in turn, enables the ESWMB to apply for grants from other parts of central government, but still requires EA approval. The ESWMB are therefore the major beneficiary of the Trust's fundraising efforts. Any award from a Trust funded grant submission, goes directly to and is managed by the ESWMB. It is hoped grants from the EA and central government will provide at least half of the cost of making the river walls resilient. The Trust work closely with the ESWMB to understand their cash needs, in particular what finance they need for their work where government funding is not available. They in turn assist the Trust with data and fact checking for grant applications to charitable trusts and foundations. The Trust monitors how grant awards are spent on the work undertaken and the ESWMB provide bespoke reports to each of the Trust and EA and updates to the AOCP.

HOW THE TRUST RAISES FUNDS

The Trust receives donations from individuals and families interested in the conservation of the estuary and its environment, charitable trusts, foundations and local businesses. A Garfield Weston Foundation grant in 2019 provided much of the community contribution for Phase 1 of the work supplemented by the efforts by the local communities to secure match funding through various events. The importance of match funding cannot be underestimated. The Trust also raises funds through activities open to all in the estuary communities. This adds to public recognition of the need for making the river walls resilient. In September 2022 the Trust held a second 'flotilla' swimming or paddling down the estuary from Aldeburgh to Orford. This event raised £46,000 with generous match funding from Cobra Mist Ltd. Local businesses kindly sponsored much of the cost of providing swimming caps and floats as well as refreshments. In April an enthusiastic volunteer and a group of supporters expertly organised a sale of 'Attic Art' at Aldeburgh Yacht Club. This event took place overlooking the estuary where the need to upgrade the walls could be seen. The Trust supported this initiative and it raised over £9,300. Community initiatives which raise awareness of the Trust's work are very important. Each year Aldeburgh Bookshop organises Christmas cards, with illustrations by local artists. We are very grateful to the artists who donated these beautiful images and to Aldeburgh Bookshop who manage the printing, distribution and sales. We thank all volunteers who helped with these very successful events. If you are interested in organising an event or have an idea for one, please get in touch with them at info@aoetrust.org.

FUTURE FUNDING PLANS

The EA requires a community contribution towards the cost of any major project. We are very fortunate in having a £3 million gift from landowners to the ESWMB, valuable donations from the estuary communities and a large grant from the Garfield Weston Foundation for the Upper Estuary. The latter was particularly important because it demonstrated to the EA that the Trust could successfully apply for such grants. Such community funding had to be part of the Business Case submitted to the EA and they were aware that this funding was available. This community contribution meant that the ESWMB could press ahead with the project as soon as the government contribution was announced.

Although the Business Cases for the Upper and Lower Estuary projects are separate, the estuary is a continuous, dynamic environment from Snape to Shingle Street, with a river wall stretching along 44 kilometres down the Suffolk coast. Because of this continuity the Trust encourages generic donations for works on the estuary as a whole. Central and local government grants are crucial for the necessary and successful improvement of our flood defences but the Trust continues to aim for a number of different income streams, one of which is submitting grant applications to charitable foundations known to favour environmental issues. The Trust and Partnership are also grateful to those generous individuals and businesses who have chosen to donate before the Business Case outcome.

The wider Partnership will continue to work with the EA and other organisations to deliver this Plan.

End

Action required to take this updating work forward:

The AOCPS are asked to consider and note this report with the aim of producing a document to be posted as an Annex to the Estuary Plan and made available along with the Plan on the AOCPS website

13 March 2024