

ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

FINAL MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE NINETEENTH MEETING OF THE ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP HELD ON THURSDAY 27th NOVEMBER 2025 AT 6.30PM AT ORFORD TOWN HALL

PRESENT:

Nominated representatives

Tim Beach (TB) Chairman	Cllr. Snape Parish Council
Jocelyn Bond (JB)	Cllr. Aldeburgh Town Council
Valerie Dunlop (VD)	Cllr. Orford and Gedgrave PC and NOTT
Roger Dawson (RD)	Cllr. Hollesley PC
Bill Parker (BP)	Sudbourne PC
Harry Young (HY)	Business Repr.
Jane Skepper (JS)	East Suffolk IDB
Edward Greenwell (EG)	ESIDB alternate
Alison Andrews (AA) Hon Secretary	Alde and Ore Association

Frances Barnwell (FB)	Vice Chairman AOCF
Chris Gill (CG)	Treasurer AOCF

ADVISERS/ATTENDEES:

Kari Nash (KN)	East Suffolk Water Management Board (ESWMB)
David Kemp (DK)	Environment Agency
Jane Maxim (JM)	The Alde & Ore Estuary Trust (AOET)
Ben Heather (BH)	Suffolk County Council, Rights of Way Dept.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 18 and 1 apology

AGENDA

1. Apologies: Andrew Reid Cllr. Suffolk County Council; Tim Wilson Cllr. East Suffolk Council (Rendlesham and Orford Ward); Tom Daly East Suffolk Council (parishes include Aldeburgh, Aldringham, Thorpe, Benhall, Friston, Knodishall, Snape and 4 more); Ben Coulter (BC) (repr.) Butley, Capel St Andrew and Wantisden PC; Peter McGinity Chillesford Parish Meeting; Boyton PC rep; Alan Hutson Iken PC; Oliver Morgan Tunstall PC; Natural England.

Tim Beach, the Chair, welcomed all the members of the public: representatives to the AOCF introduced themselves.

2. Declarations of interest: No new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting on 27th March 2025

These were approved.

Proposer FB, seconder RD

4. Matters arising from the meeting on 27th March 2025 not otherwise on the agenda – none.

5. Iken Clay- outcome of the case

TB said that the Environment Agency criminal investigations into clay imported and deposited at Iken had begun in September 2018: the case in court finally was completed this year on 26th September. It was the view of many of us that the investigation had cut across the ability to build flood defences, and he said that could be a separate discussion with the Environment Agency. The outcome was that the ESWMB had received a small fine of £4000 and some clay providing businesses had also been fined: his best guess was the costs of the case could have gone into seven figures, which seemed unbalanced. The AOCF had written several times to get disclosure as to what was happening and to get the case set apart from the estuary plans which was eventually allowed in 2022. JS

agreed with TB, and said the case should never have got that far or gone on so long and it had had a dramatic impact on delivery of the Estuary Plan. The Judge had made it quite clear his view of the case when delivering a judgment, required by statute, by awarding the lowest possible fines and reducing them further. AOCIP had agreed to pay for that transcript.

CC (member of the public) had sat through the entire case and reported that he had never seen a judge more bemused, and that a third of the Judge's observations was that the estuary plan should be proceeded with immediately but whether that would be translated into policy was another issue.

TB and JS said that the one positive is that the clay is allowed to stay on site and was of a material which could be used in wall repairs provided a licence was obtained. JS said the landowners had agreed to continue to host it.

TB said he had been in discussion with the new EA Area Director, not previously involved in the case, about what might be done about the impact of the case and to review the case for the sake of learning from it, including asking why we as communities were not consulted and where was the consideration of the public interest. He would report back at the next meeting. He repeated that David Kemp, here today had not had anything to do with the case.

6. Update on the Upper Estuary Embankment Improvement Programme and the Lower Estuary plans.

KN, ESWMB, provided the project update. She commented that Pete Roberts who had given the last update had now left ESWMB and had done a real sterling job over the last three years; she extended great thanks to him for all his work in the project. TB on behalf of the AOCIP also wanted to record its thanks to Pete.

KN said that over the summer, work fell into three strands, working in parallel. ESWMB submitted the application for the Flood Activity Permit (FRAP) to do the work, had sought approval for the amended project to deal with two not four flood cells (just Flood Cells 6 and 7, Snape Maltings and Snape Village, leaving out FC 5 and 10, Iken and Aldeburgh) The funds originally allocated for the 4 flood cells in the upper estuary were not sufficient for all 4 cells. The funds were therefore to be used for the amended project. The work was put out for tender. The FRAP had required updating the modelling, on the likely impact on flooding in adjacent flood cells of the smaller project (the last one had been done in 2017/18) The update was done by HR Wallingford)

Unfortunately, the results showed that the probability of flood events would be increased, with more frequent and higher levels of water and 11 or 13 rather than 5 properties across Iken and Orford being affected by the work. ESWMB had struggled to find a solution to mitigate the additional flooding but, with two not four flood cells being repaired, the potentially temporary higher flood risk in the excluded cells could become permanent and mitigation for the immediate FRAP application was not possible. As part of the process JS said the Board had looked to see if the risk could be mitigated but solutions did not meet EA requirements that there be no risk to properties. JM checked that if Flood Cell 7 were done might that protect 51 properties, but leave 11-14 properties in the Iken and Orford vulnerable: this was confirmed. Second, the funding request to spend the same level of funds on two flood cells started to be processed in good time but then received a red light because of the difficulty with the FRAP. Third, tenders had been put out to contractors in the spring with a view to the amended Upper Estuary project starting in the autumn. Three companies had come forward with tenders but these had to be put on hold because of the lack of FRAP approval and grant in aid funding.

KN said that the Water Board is left with the issue of how to progress at least a part of the project, perhaps looking more at Flood Cell 6. She commented that the transfer of any flood risk from Flood Cell 6 (Snape Maltings) to Flood Cell, (Snape Village) from not doing the two flood cells at the same time would be minimal with only one outbuilding vulnerable. The EA had confirmed that this was not an issue.

DK added that back in March two issues had been identified that might affect the permission for an amended project. First, as the 4 flood cells were hydraulically linked, any likely increased risk of flooding in the original project could have been reduced by not closing off, that is completing, any of the four flood cells until the last year of the project. The updated modelling however showed that risk of flooding with only two cells could not be managed because of the hydraulic links between all the flood cells. Second, the delays to the project had meant soaring costs in 2023 and 2024 and the cost increase had continued, so making the project in its original shape unattainable without significant funding from government.

7. The Way Forward

7.1 DK gave the background that, back in 2015, looking at the large flood cells it was seen that there was an opportunity to do full scale refurbishment which could protect the area for a good number of years. It was a big project; hence it had been divided into the upper and lower estuary stages to make it manageable. Soaring costs from 2022 onwards have come to make that approach unaffordable. DK continued saying that the updated modelling showed that the likely rise in water levels and impact between flood cells was going to be greater than expected a few years back and affected the aspirations, including on walls levels, built into the plan. Extending this finding to the rest of the estuary including FC4, Orford and Gedgrave with a 16 km wall, it was necessary to look at what could be done instead.

7.2 The flood grant rules were currently changing with a new system being introduced from April 2026 although the guidance needed to help us move forward was not yet available in detail. Previously the assessment for Grant-in Aid, used Outcome Measure 2 which determined number of properties substantially protected and so qualifying from flooding; under the amended Upper Estuary Project only 7 properties would qualify of OM2 standard and 12 properties were more likely to be flooded which was not a tenable position. OM2 had required a very high level of protection, now it would be 'better protected': following a question from JM about what the new terminology 'better protected' meant, DK said that new standard might be more relaxed and protected from a higher tide not a significantly higher tide under the new rules which would help plans in the estuary. Against that, there were very limited national funds and the area would be in competition with many other parts of the country but even so we should be in a better position than before.

7.3 TB, after some wide-ranging discussions and airing of issues and concerns, said that a new approach was needed to work for the whole estuary and that could range from filling the low spots to maintenance to more extensive repair work. To start the process of exploring new ways of working, TB suggested one way was to get all the key players into a room for an open meeting and establish what each could contribute. These would include the EA, Water Board, IDB, infrastructure holders such as Anglian water and power suppliers, and local authorities at District and County level as well as AOCP and AOET representatives. He had already mentioned to our local MP, Jenny Riddell Carpenter that she might help us get all the players around the table, as had been done successfully with infrastructure holders pre-pandemic. He recognized that this meant spending more time looking at what can be done and was a significant piece of work, but the facts were there is no money and the plan we had in 2023 is unlikely to fly now, so we need to revisit how we deal with repairing estuary defences. It was important to be clear as to what different bodies and organisations would do and commit to doing in developing a new set of works.

7.4 In the discussion a large number of different issues and details which would need to be taken into consideration emerge. These included:

- i. Could there be an overarching FRAP for the estuary? Was maintenance subject to a FRAP or were there were different degrees of maintenance or repairs that would be subject to the higher bar criteria required by FRAPs (Flood Risk Activity Permits) for more substantial renovations/improvements/wall building. Was putting back to the wall level created after the 1953 flood of 10ft 6' maintenance? (DK said that the answer might depend on whether anything might be put at greater risk of flooding than before). Would adding weight to the back of the wall count as maintenance? (DK probably not) Wall design criteria had changed over the years- would simple repairs have to comply with the new standards? (DK thought the answer would depend on the details but there could be options.). What permissions would be needed to cover environmental protection issues such as the Habitats Regulation Assessment even if a full FRAP was not required? All these issues would need to be clarifying before, and as plans, were developed.
- ii. It was commented that maintenance seemed a quite exciting route forward: what would be the standards to be built back to? DK confirmed that building higher than any previous level to allow for future slumping would not count as maintenance. DK said the practice in the EA was to settle at a level that does not increase flood risk. That said, as areas varied so much, there had to be a pragmatic approach, and if, for example, a wall had long been below the post 1953 level, the issues in that area would have to be explored to determine a reasonable level. As ever, a limiting factor might be what was affordable.
- iii. An Orford resident advised that maintenance itself was not necessarily straightforward as, for example, time was needed for new work to settle or if small stretches were thought sound and omitted, they could well be unexpectedly blown in a huge storm (witness a wall section on the Deben in 2013 left untouched because of the special snail population which was the only part to blow).
- iv. A further comment was that it seemed that a maintenance approach could mean even more work for each area and was there the capacity to do it, but another comment was that the works could happen over time. JS said that the IDB has an overarching maintenance work proposals plan for all its drainage works and over time that route of something similar could prioritise which work could be done. This would have to bear in mind the budgetary provision for maintenance.

v. It was commented that costs were clearly an issue. What scope was there to reduce or cut out regulations and requirements by getting change at a local or national level? TB said we can try but such changes were slow to come: we had already asked our MP, JRC, to seek some simplifications. DK said EA did try to help with this at a local level.

vi. Potential sources of funds for repairs were discussed. JM asked about what money might be available for maintenance from the EA. DK explained that while EA had a budget for maintenance, it was currently at the lowest level he had known, and the projected larger budgets won't come in for 2 or 3 years. The money that had been allocated for the Upper Estuary Plan was from the capital budget and could not be moved across to maintenance. JM asked that, as some of that grant had come from the Regional Flood and Coast Committee, whether that might be available; TB from his experience of the RFCC thought that might be difficult if the GiA the RFCC money was supporting was lost; it needed exploring.

vii. BP commented that as he understood it the frequency of overtopping river walls was likely to increase. His understanding was that the Iken wall was unlikely to breach. There was however a lot of infrastructure protected by the walls, such as water treatment plants, which could become more vulnerable: would a maintenance rather than rebuild programme provide sufficient protection or have sufficient protection built in? DK commented that it has been done elsewhere with similar issues and generally the infrastructure holder, most usually Anglian Water would be brought into the plans. It was agreed that those sorts of issues would need to be considered.

7.5 In discussion of how detailed work might be taken forward by local working groups:

i. A question was asked about the EA's view of the plan being developed by a group for walls surrounding Orford. DK said he had met with the group. The estuary flood cells are intrinsically linked. Estuary plans in the 1990's started looking at individual particular areas within a flood cell but found that if houses were taken out of the flood cell that meant potential funding available for the rest of the cell would be reduced and in the longer term if the remaining flood cell walls deteriorated these parts would be flooded more frequently, the river volume and flow each tide would increase and adversely affect all neighbouring parts. Another person added that changes in one flood cell could mean increased flow elsewhere. BP commented that again critical infrastructure would need to be considered. TB said that Orford Group were working on an idea, seeking to bring in the Parish Council, with the aim for bringing it forward for consideration by the EA and AOCP.

ii. EG raised the issue of how would the planning and work be taken forward: it was emerging that a number of separate working groups might come forward but there would need to be co-ordination of hydrology and engineering as that couldn't be done independently by any one area, The AOCP was the guardian of the estuary plan but would need flood management expertise. TB agreed there would need to be a body the IDB or another RMA would need to be considered.

iii. EG pointed out that, following possible separate plans, up to now funding collected in from the estuary had been on the basis that this was an estuary wide plan. If there were to be separate projects that might change: it would need addressing too.

iv. A member of the public, asked if a small working group was the way forward, would it come under the overall cover of the AOCP, IDB and EA working together. TB said it was a possibility and how different groups might be managed and coordinated was to be explored. That said, any proposals for anywhere would still have to comply with, for example, criteria for maintenance, environmental requirements, avoiding causing flooding in other areas and changing or building new walls would require FRAPs. So essentially the AOCP, AOET, EA and IDB would have to have some sort of oversight, level of influence or control for a number of plans. This would require a good half day's discussion working through this. But he agreed that it was not too simplistic to say that using the will and energy behind different groups could all help bring the plan together.

v. JM pointed out that we should remember that the IDB had an immense amount of information already paid for on flood works and that we should use it.

7.6 Other issues which were raised were:

i. As to whether the sea might break through into the river at Slaughden Ridge/ Sudbourne Beach, some 500m south of the Aldeburgh Martello Tower. DK explained that there was clay base below that shingle ridge and above it had been the haul road. A 2016 report by Professor Pye explained this and the length of time a breakthrough might take. AA added that Professor Pye was currently undertaking further detailed research to update his report which would help inform the original assessments). DK said that the worst thing that could happen would not be overtopping but breaching of the river walls protecting the large Flood Cells 4 and 5 (Orford/Gedgrave and Iken): then, if the tide reached into those large areas twice a day, the volume of water and water flow coming in and out of the estuary would be substantially greater, bringing a whole host of problems. So far since his own work in 2015, DK said that a measure of comfort was that the coast appeared to be behaving as foreshadowed.

ii. JS explained that an essential part of flood cell protection were the pumping stations as these enabled overtopping or flood water to be expelled as rapidly as possible via the sluices after flooding as well as managing water levels generally. Unfortunately, many of the pumps powering these sluices were coming to the end of their

lives and needed replacing; funding had been reduced recently. JM asked how maintenance for the pumping stations were funded. KN says this came from the Board's reserves. New pumps could cost over £5m each and the Water Board would still seek to get grant-in-aid from the EA but funds were limited.

iii. A member of the public asked about the use of the Public Works Loan raised by the Alde and Ore landowners and held by the DB and whether any had been spent on the Iken Clay Court case. JS explained that the Iken Clay court case costs had been paid out of interest earned on the loan. The Alde & Ore landowners, who are the majority ratepayers, are still servicing the loan annually onwards until the end of the 30 year period. The loan would be used to lever further funds and primarily to do maintenance works.

iv. An Orford resident asked what would happen in Orford if the walls were raised either side of the village and the hump in the road to the quay which looked lower than the current walls was not changed. Another Orford resident had witnessed in 2013 the water coming within inches of the tops of the walls either side of the quay and at that time no water had gone over the hump, which was encouraging.

v. JS raised the concern as to what was the position in practice now about whether the EA were still repairing the front of walls where there were Essex blocks. Was that going to continue? DK commented that the blocks were put in 25 years ago and EA had to put in bids for the work and, as for other sums of money bid for, the number of properties protected would be a factor in getting funding.

vi. Were all the players being brought in such as the National Trust, RSPB and others For example the Suffolk Wildlife Trust planned to keep the reserve behind the Stanny walls and would have an interest. TB said that was the intention but do write in with other suggestions.

7.7 On the way forward, TB summarized that as there was little or no money, for reasons essentially out of the Partnership's hands, the Estuary Plan implementation developed in detail since 2016 could not fly so that we faced either walking away or finding a new approach, possibly maintenance and repair rather than reconstruction, involving working groups for each area/flood cell and a method of oversight and coordination of all plans. To start the new process AOCF would arrange a meeting, hopefully to be held at Snape Maltings, led by our local MP, Jenny Riddell- Carpenter, involving all the key players in flood defence in the estuary including the EA, the Water Management Board and IDB, the County and district councils and the AOET to establish what was possible, who would contribute resources or expertise or advice and to think through an area by area approach which could be kept consistent with the concept of the whole estuary as all its parts are interlinked. The aim would be to do this early in 2026. This would be the start of developing a revised approach to the Estuary Plan. TB pointed out at the end of the discussions that a real positive emerging from the meeting was that no one was giving up and all the organisations represented here are wanting to carry on to see what can be done. He commended DK, KN and the IDB team for all their work. Further, a great deal of data had been assembled over the development of the earlier works and that still remained available for future plans.

8. Communications

It was commented at various points that communication with everyone in the estuary communities will be needed to explain, as at the meeting, what has happened, where matters stand and the ways forward to seek to secure sound flood defences which meet essential criteria, such as nowhere to be at greater risk of flooding, and which are affordable from whatever funds are available.

It was agreed that first, as well as the minutes of the meeting, the AOCF would produce a briefing for all parish and other representatives to enable clear and consistent messages to reach all parts of the estuary. Obviously as matters progressed other means including the website, newsletters and open days/drop-ins could be used to suit the issue or area.

9. Finance

AA reported that there was over £14,000 in the AOCF accounts of which some £9000 were not restricted and so could be used for meetings, and documentation, posters and the like.

10. Any other business

BH, recently joined to head the Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Department, asked about the history of the pilot project on the river wall top surface just south of Orford begun around 2011 and who was responsible for it to be repaired, as the wall was in a poor state there. EG agreed to help him with details about the history of that section.

TB thanked everyone for their contributions and he would now take the agreed approach to finding new ways to implement the Plan.

11. Date of Next Meeting: the next quarterly meeting of the AOCF would be on Thursday 26th March 2026 at 6.30pm, location to be announced.

18.12.2025

Approved 26.3.2026