

ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

DRAFT MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
HELD ON THURSDAY 26th MARCH 2025 AT 6.30PM AT ORFORD TOWN HALL

PRESENT:

Nominated representatives

Frances Barnwell (FB)	ViceChairman AOCF
Tom Daly	Cllr. East Suffolk Council
Andrew Armitage(Arm)	Cllr. Aldeburgh Town Council
Ian Thornton (IT)	Cllr. Orford and Gedgrave PC
Roger Dawson (RD)	Cllr. Hollesley PC
Andrew McDonald(AM)	Cllr. Snape PC
David McGinity(DMc)	Cllr. Butley, Capel St Andrews and Wantisden PC
Oliver Morgan(OM)	Cllr. Tunstall PC
Harry Young(HY)	Business Repr.
Jane Skepper (JS)	East Suffolk IDB Chair
Edward Greenwell (EG)	ESIDB alternate
Alison Andrews(AA)Hon Secretary	Alde and Ore Association

Chris Gill (CG) Treasurer AOCF

ADVISERS/ATTENDEES:

Kari Nash (KN)	East Suffolk Water Management Board (ESWMB)
David Kemp (DK)	Environment Agency (East Anglia Incidents Recovey Manager)
George Fuhrmann(GF)	Environment Agency (Norfolk and Suffolk)
Jane Maxim (JM)	The Alde & Ore Estuary Trust (AOET)

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 11

AGENDA

FB began, as you know, Tim Beach has had to step back due ill health. I am sure we all wish him a full recovery and extend thanks to him for the great contribution he has made. In his absence, I am chairing this meeting.

1. Apologies: Andrew Reid Cllr. Suffolk County Council; Tim Wilson Cllr. East Suffolk Council (Rendlesham and Orford Ward); Peter McGinity Chillesford Parish Meeting; Boyton PC rep; Alan Hutson Iken PC; Bill Parker Sudbourne PC ; Ben Heather Suffolk County Council, Rights of Way Dept.: Natural England.

2. Declarations of interest: Annual declaration forms to be circulated. The Chair added that there were no issues today that were location specific.

3. Minutes of the meeting on 27th November 2025

These were approved. Proposer JS, seconder HY

4. Matters arising from the meeting on 27th March 2025 not otherwise on the agenda

para 7.3 This item recorded that Tim Beach had spoken to our MP, Jenny Riddell Carpenter, about a meeting bringing together organisations and people who might commit to a new way of achieving the Estuary Plan. On 26 March an email from her office had been received saying they were keen to get a date into the diary. This was good news.

5. Update on action since the last meeting on 27th November 2025, a presentation of possible ways forward to implement the Estuary Plan, and in the light of that, discussion of the next steps.

5.1 FB reminded the meeting that in November the AOCF faced a stark choice of doing nothing about the declining condition of our river walls to find an alternative route to increase their resilience. She was pleased to say that there has been considerable progress since that meeting. The Water Management Board had developed a programme, in conjunction with the Environment Agency, that aims address resilience by filling low spots and weaknesses in the river walls throughout the estuary. Whilst a less ambitious programme than originally envisaged, this was a practical response to an invidious situation while keeping the door open for any future improvements. She was most grateful to all involved for the time and effort it has taken to get to this point.

5.2 The aim of this meeting was to inform the AOCP of the developments and ask for agreement in principle to the proposals. She invited Janey Skepper, the Chair of the ESWMB, and Kari Nash to set out the proposals and possible next steps. David Kemp from the Environment Agency and Jane Maxim from the Alde and Ore Estuary Trust would then give their perspectives.

5.3 KN, Project Delivery Officer ESWMB, gave a presentation about the proposal which would maintain the estuary walls but leave the option of further improvements. She showed a slide based on the Estuary Plan detailing all the assets that were currently protected by the walls within the estuary area. The proposal was not replacing the Estuary Plan but picked up the elements looking at maintenance sitting alongside capital improvement, effectively starting to deliver half the plan. It was quite a unique proposal and she was not aware of another like it: it was a financial partnership with partners coming together to form a funding pot contributed to by at least 3 bodies- the ESWMB, the Alde and Ore Estuary Trust, and the EA - and it was a delivery partnership too. The aim was to create an annual pot of £500,000 with exact amounts per contributor varying. The ESWMB would provide up to £250,00 from the Public Sector Works Loan which landowners were funding, the AOET would commit in principle to match-fund up to £250,000 a year, there would be a contribution from the EA precept and from the EA maintenance grants, plus there were additional sources to apply to, such as the RFCC, Anglian Water.

5.3 A prioritised plan would be developed for initially a minimum of a 5-year period with the aim to 'sustain, conserve and protect'. This would involve revisiting priorities on the state of the walls assessed in the original estuary plan, plus using data from the earlier outline business cases submitted for grant-in-aid, EA's engineers annual surveys, Alde and Ore Association surveys, and LIDAR. The aim would be topping up walls and strengthening the fronts or backs where needed to sustain, conserve and protect existing defences.

5.4 The framework for the agreed allocation of work would be an overarching agreement, a Public Sector Cooperation Agreement (PSCA), between the ESWMB as one RMA (Risk Management Authority), and the EA as another RMA. DK explained that the PSCA was a legal instrument from 2007 which enables RMAs to help each other out working together, was quite key to this programme. This arrangement would enable ESWMB to take on a number of EA duties and would involve less overlapping bureaucracy and paperwork. It also allows the EA to have an overview of the quality of the work, to discuss work and provide advice and so give a better product. Under the PSCA Schedule 3, which would be renewed annually, would set out the programme of works to be delivered that year.

5.5 DK was delighted that this proposal had got so far so quickly. It was inspired by a programme in the Broads where a lot had been learned about people/bodies working together with limited resources and demonstrated how defences could be strengthened where needed in different ways to increase resilience quickly. DK explained that finance is always a problem. Whereas 15-20 years ago EA would give an amount to a local engineer to use as he thought best, now for every piece of work, whether for maintenance or capital works, the money has to be bid for. The details of how new rules will work, the first massive change since 2012, are still being worked out. It was likely that in year 1 of the new grant system starting in July this year, a lot of money will go to areas with many properties e.g. Derby and Preston, but he and KN will seek to find all they can and will do their best to find other sources of funding. In his view the prioritised programme is the best shot we have with money we can mobilise now.

5.6 JS added that as well as money from the EA grant system, AIMS, there is also a commitment to the precept. This was a new idea: building on the system of the IDB paying precepts to EA for moving water around, now some of that precept would be returned to the area to use in the programme. JS said it was important to understand that the EA is committed to working to this new way of working. Also, from IDBoard's perspective, the funding will come mostly from the Public Sector Works Loan, which is not large considering the amount of works to be done, but the new PSCA will allow us to use it and the other funds to go for other bigger pots to do more work, so that each year planned works may be larger than the basic sums provided for in the pot. As we have more money we can carry on with more works. As far as she is concerned, and she is the third chair of this board since the Estuary Plan was started as well as having been part of the landowners works committee, she highly welcomes this PSCA: she implored everyone to endorse their involvement with it too, to take the chance of making things happen.

5.7 JM explained that the Trust were committing funding in principle and it has to be so as the Trust has to manage donations and ensure people who have donated know what is happening to their money. The Trust will require the ESWMB and EA agreement to have tangible goals and objectives in the agreement.

5.8 On a broader point, JM said that EA as a whole does not have to justify what it does except to a limited extent, but the Trust (AOET) needs to have reassurance from the EA that the EA will support the project and this new way of working. On the EA bigger funding pot, it is recognised that money is still to go to urban areas but the message to EA is that it still does not take into sufficient account rural properties, businesses, agricultural land and habitats; these need to be in the frame too: the EA could be more constructive about the country as a whole and we look forward to see the new proposals as they come out for the new funding stream.

5.9 Providing more context to funding, JM said the Trust has funded the OBCs for the capital works projects, now on hold, not dead in the water as some have described. Indeed further the Trust's funding had enabled a large capital sum to be secured from the EA and RFCC which provided a number of surveys which can be used to inform the new way of working. The Trust is choosing to go forward with funding this proposal as some maintenance needs to be done but the Trust will not lose sight of the larger projects.

5.10 KN set out the timetable envisaged for the roll-out of the new plan, working to the aim to start work on the ground in 2027/28. ESWMB were planning to bring in a new project officer in the next two weeks. They will have to meet the Trust and Partnership, and get out around the estuary to understand what needs to be done. The aim is to get the Schedule 3 document signed for work this year. To do this:

by June there needs to be a full understanding of what needs doing across the estuary, including existing heights, agreeing baseline heights, identifying where work is needed on fronts and other maintenance and repairs, so as to compile a whole picture of what is required:

by September to have developed this understanding into a 5-year prioritised programme, which can then be revisited to check with priorities in the Plan and with all the parties, cost it up into around £500 k programme and where there is more work to cost that and identify who might be approached for funding.

by November to have a specific detailed programme for the following year 2027/28 with costings, consents and licences applied for.

by January the aim is to sign Schedule 3 with the EA and have all consents and licences signed for delivery of the first set of work in 2027/28.

Plus, alongside the prioritised programme, once the new funding rules sorted out, a further look at the wider plan for capital works including the scale and possibilities within the new funding rules.

5.11 KN showed a number of examples from the Broads where this approach had been very successful in strengthening older defences, including raising a wall crest and broadening the top for a mile in length, i.e. not just odd spots but good lengths where needed; in another place using dredged material to top-up and level the bank; in another increasing the top level by over a metre, refilling the back face and producing a wider crest to help easier maintenance in future; and the use of brought-in material.

5.12 HY, as Chief Operating Officer of Brittan-Pears, reported on flood defence plans for Snape Maltings. The flood cell, FC6, is the anomaly because it is such a small area that works there would not impact/transfer flood risk elsewhere in the estuary. In 2013 the flood level was only 3 inches below the defences in what was a 1:18 event: it could have flooded to 8 foot if the water had gone over. There had been permission for work to be done in 2015 but the Maltings had preferred to stay part of the then estuary proposal for 10 years. Indeed, the economic value of Snape Maltings had considerably enhanced the possible grant allocation for the whole of the upper estuary. That project had been devastatingly frustrated and a new way was needed.

HY explained that with the Upper Estuary capital project on hold, Snape Maltings now needed to look at a standalone project. It had already raised funds for improving buildings and now was looking for funds for the defences. The option of getting some EA/RFCC levy money, even with ESC help, was not looking that hopeful, so they were looking at an entirely self-funded project. With a fair wind, they had hopes of starting in October but would need to have cleared the Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) and a number of Listed building planning permissions before then and raised the money. Snape Maltings still wanted to help the rest of the estuary and were hugely grateful to the Trust, ESWMB, EA and others for help to get so far on with the plans. JS wanted to say that Snape Maltings could have gone with an earlier individual plan and she wanted to thank HY and the Maltings for sticking with us until recently, their support for last 10 years was very, very valued.

5.14 TD recognized how disappointing it was to have lost the funding. Unfortunately, there was still great uncertainty as to how the new EA financial rules would work out. He pointed to how money had suddenly been taken away from the Lowestoft flood defence plans. People making public/private arrangements which don't depend on money coming from government need to be considered. Further, it was increasingly difficult to get government money for social community matters, even protecting our landscape and communities. The more independent actions such as the proposal today were joined up the better.

5.15 In response to questions

- a) Could all the work be done in 5 years? KN said that she acknowledged that there was a lot of maintenance to be done and it could take more than 5 years but it was important to get the project working. Once the project was rolling it should be possible to bring in more money and do more work.
- b) DK and KN agreed that once a proposed plan for works in any one year had been prepared, it could certainly be made available in map form and could be discussed at AOCP.
- c) What level of protection will be achieved by the new works? KN said that capital works would provide for a 1: 200 event resilience. But the level of protection from the maintenance works would depend on the varying states of the walls - these had been identified in the original plan being of green status, i.e. good condition even in 2050, through a ski run of blue, red and black status, the last one needing the most immediate attention. These need reassessing.

DK said that generally to achieve a 1:200 resilience to overtopping, wall heights were usually about 3.05 - 3.07 metres. The aim in the proposal was to hold the water back as much as possible and enable the walls to withstand overtopping so we don't get a breach. The aim with any defences works was to top-up as we can so as to avoid breaches. The other consideration in building up defences was the need to avoid building up one area at the expense of increasing the likelihood of another part of the area being flooded, it was necessary to protect people from flooding overall.

- d) Is there an aspiration to get to the post 1953 seawalls levels? DK replied that the intent was to do that but couldn't say just yet how far this could be done without causing problems elsewhere in the estuary.
- e) Were capital projects now not an option? Did the Upper Estuary plan ever stand a chance? DK said that in relation to the upper estuary project, given the hydraulic inter-relationship of the four flood cells, the plan had been to do build up walls of all four at the same time and close them off the same time and in that way avoid transferring flooding for one flood cell to another. JM said we had hit a bit of a buffer and had the Trust had a spare £12 million in its coffers it might have been possible to do the top four flood cells plan. The proposal on the table would still allow for capital projects to be done alongside.
- f) Once assessments have been made and a local area has a problem, could it address that work itself? JS said that the annual discussion of priorities would take in to account in views from different parts, so the plan is how best to co-ordinate the works for the benefit of the estuary and some parts may need to be done sooner than others because of the relative level of risks to places and the estuary as a whole. FB suggested there might need to be criteria to guide the choice of priorities, and this could be based on risk factors.
- g) What happens to the values under the business case for the upper estuary? DK explained that the value of factors measured under OM1 for grants purposes under the previous grant system was set at 6% and given the value of Snape Maltings that helped increase the potential grant. However, the new financial rules were at present unclear as to exactly how economic and other values would be assessed.
- h) Given recent discussions in Parliament, how likely was the merger of the EA and Natural England and would it affect this project? DK commented that there are a great many change proposals facing Defra and a particularly tricky area, which had been looked at before, was merging the different legal powers and duties of the two bodies. Also, there were wider discussions going on in relation to water such as those from the Cunliffe report on the many different aspects of water management.

5.16 After the discussion and all points raised had been explored, FB summarised we had reached a stage to decide on the way forward. The proposed 5 year rolling programme designed to ensure that major weaknesses emerging in the walls since they were built post 1953 are addressed on a spot-by-spot basis, not necessarily whole flood cell at a time, so works would be across the estuary. The rolling programme would provide for keeping walls in a good state to resist breaching, and would not preclude having larger individual project sites subject to relevant

approvals and funding. This is a project designed to serve the local community and it would be good to know if the proposal had the support of the community representatives. JS made the proposal and RD seconded it. All representatives present voted in favour of the proposal to continue progress along the lines set out this evening.

6. Communications

FB said that moving into this new approach, communications would be very important on such a complicated process, including frequent updates and a refreshed web site. A new update newsletter was needed. Much of this communication would be done in partnership with the ESWMB, EA and the Trust. Further the ten year review of the Plan was due in 2026, although at the time that provision was suggested much of the plan was expected to have been implemented, the review still needed to be got underway and the annex of 2024 updated. She asked for volunteers to help get all this underway. HY volunteered immediately for the communications group and others were asked to consider if they can help, or know of others who might help with refreshed communications.

7. Finance Accounts Report for the year ending 31 December 2025.

7.1 CG said the accounts were very simple being mainly receipts in the form of Building Society interest and expenditure on the website and this year on the Court hearing judgement. Net assets at 31 December 2025 stood at £14,447.45 of which £5333 were restricted funds for use on saltings work, the remaining £9,114.45 being for unrestricted use.

7.2 EA were still trying to work out where a grant for AOCF admin and comms work had gone, so it was possible there was a further £2,500 to come to add to the Building Society account of £14,477.45.

8. Officers

8.1 FB said it was time to elect or re-elect officers. In particular our excellent Chair, Tim Beach, had had to stand back from being involved. He had done a tremendous amount to keep the AOCF going including a good many challenges to the EA during the Iken clay saga to enable the estuary plan to be progressed and recently in seeing how best to find a new direction once the costs of the main project soared into beyond what was raisable in a very short space of time. All present fully concurred their appreciation for all that Tim Beach had done from when he joined the AOEP around 2014, took on the chair of the AOCF when it formed in January 2020 until this January 2026.

8.2 The agenda had asked for expressions of interest in becoming an officer. FB said that with AOCF agreement, elections would be postponed to the next meeting. This would give a better opportunity for those potentially interested to consider the latest developments and how they might wish to be involved. Nominations would be invited in advance of the next meeting. This was agreed.

9. Any other business- None

11. Date of Next Meeting: the next quarterly meeting of the AOCF would be on Thursday 25th June 2026 at 6.30pm, location to be announced.

13 April 2026