

# ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

DRAFT MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP HELD ON THURSDAY 30 MARCH 2023 AT 6.30PM IN SNAPE VILLAGE HALL

## PRESENT:

Nominated representatives

Tim Beach (TB) Chairman	Cllr. Snape Parish Council
Andrew Reid (AR)	Cllr Suffolk County Council
Peter Palmer (PP)	Cllr. Aldeburgh TC
Gary Wingrove (GW)	Orford and Gedgrave PC
Edward Greenwell (EG)	IDB alternate
Alison Andrews (AA)	Alde and Ore Association
Frances Barnwell (FB)	Vice Chairman AOCF
Chris Gill (CG)	Treasurer

## ADVISERS/ATTENDEES:

Giles Bloomfield (GB)	East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board (ESIDB)
David Kemp (DK)	Environment Agency (EA)
Jane Maxim (JM)	Alde and Ore Estuary Trust

## MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 1

## AGENDA

**1. Apologies:** Ben Coulter repr. Butley, Capel St Andrew and Wantisden PC; Cllr Russ Rainger East Suffolk Council, Andrew Cassy/Andrew Greenwell Boyton PC; Ray Herring Cllr. East Suffolk Council; Peter McGinity Chillesford Parish Meeting; Jeremy Hinvre Iken PC; Oliver Morgan Tunstall PC; Bill Parker Sudbourne PC; Jane Skepper IDB Alternate; Ed Boyle Natural England; Andrew McDonald Comms Group; Harry Young Business Representative.

### **2. Declarations of interest**

Declarations of Interest forms for 2023 : Forms had been circulated and were being returned.

### **3. Minutes of the meeting on 26 January 2023**

These were agreed (proposer EG, seconder PP)

### **4. Matters arising from the meeting on 26 January 2023 not otherwise on the agenda**

None, all were to be covered under the agenda.

### **5. IDB**

#### **Roll out of Upper Estuary Embankment Improvement Programme**

5.1. GB said that the preparations for the phase 1 Upper Estuary Embankment Improvements were well underway and Pete Roberts, the delivery engineer, had issued two newsletters (*these have been circulated to AOCF contacts and are on the AOCF web site*). The preparatory work ranged from appointing consultants, getting the necessary specifications for ground and other investigations, environmental impact assessments, obtaining necessary core samples and more. PR had also ready contacted most landowners whose land would be affected by the footprint of the works including the specialists in relation to Snape Maltings where the nature of the buildings and varied embankment/flood defence structures involved complex plans. The aim was for the complete works design to be in place by around this coming September, so that the programme of work could start as soon as possible next year when conditions should be good enough, probably around April subject to weather.

5.2. With this in mind GB suggested that the best time for a full community meeting on the Upper Estuary works about what was to be done, the time scale and programme of the construction during 2023-2027, would be in September. Hopefully it could be held in Snape Maltings.

### **Lower Estuary Outline Business case**

5.3 GB said that he and DK had together secured, subject to some internal processes, just under £100,000 to fund the work on the phase 2 Lower Estuary Business Case. Preparation of the Case was well underway. The necessary economic appraisal had already been done within the appraisal for the entire estuary as part of the Upper Estuary Case, and similarly the necessary work on hydraulic modelling was complete. At the last meeting it had been asked if there was a Plan B: GB said that there could not be one as the only alternative to not doing all the lower estuary walls was to do wrap-around defences protecting the settlements but such defences would be far more costly: they would require higher walls than would be necessary for a total refurbishment of Lower Estuary walls because of the hydrodynamics of the larger areas which would be left unprotected and so flooded more regularly. He had concluded that Plan B did not stack up and the hold the line policy was the way forward for the Lower Estuary design.

5.4 GB mentioned that there were wider Suffolk coast and even national considerations which now need to be taken into account in developing the lower estuary design including what might be happening to the lower estuary saltings in relation to coastal squeeze. However, he was optimistic that, using the results of the Healthy Estuary Report of 2020 which showed saltings in the upper estuary in a favourable light, and the existence of Hazlewood and Lantern Marshes as areas of increased saltings, and the far time line looking 50 years ahead, a way through could be found. He would be having discussions with EA and Natural England on this.

5.5 Turning to the signing off of the Lower Estuary project, GB said that the Trust needed confidence in the case to seek support from donors. There was a twist, as the Business case could not be signed off by EA until necessary funding was in place but some funding could not be secured until there was greater surety about the plan. There was a funding gap of about £20 million, taking account of inflation figures and forecasts, but the Lower Estuary already had an indicative grant allocation of £12 million, so a good start had been made.

5.6 EG asked whether the plan for higher and heavier walls might compress the subsoil further affecting the walls on top. GB described the complex calculations in relation to weight, water content and widths, processes for drying out clay material (windrows and turning). The calculations led to an appropriate wall height of 3.3m and that was indeed close to the calculations made for the 1953 wall restoration. He added that these later calculations also allowed for extra width on the wall to secure access and access for maintenance in future years, building in a safety factor too. The design would also allow for a slightly higher wall if needed at a later date in the future. Taking account of all these costs, the economics remained very sound with a return of 10:1 for the upper estuary and 2.5:1 for the lower estuary. All through these calculations, despite increase in costs the funding gap had always been around £15-20 million.

5.7 Questions were asked about whether any consideration was being given to a stronger or different top surface cover where footfall was very heavy. Vulnerable places with heavily used paths on the walls included the Slaughden stretch and the wall in front of and south of Orford in particular where the wear and tear had both widened and lowered the wall. GB explained that where grass alone might not work, any surface with a plastic or similar membrane would be liable to rapid erosion in a flooding or overtopping and that in his experience layers of hoggins with seed in it placed directly upon the clay base were more resilient. Asked if toppings could be sound, slightly, environmentally friendly and access facilitated, he commented that as well as particular designs for access points, nowadays finely crushed building material was thought to be the most environmentally friendly method but he mentioned crushed asphalt had also worked at Walberswick. There was also the issue of repairs- a material that could be carried in by wheelbarrow and dumper to deal with small repairs would be most efficacious. He would discuss the surfacing matter further with Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Dept. Another suggestion was that where walls were subject to heavy usage, they might be built a few inches higher to counter the flattening effect of walkers and GB agreed that was an idea to look at. GB said he had not priced for topping/walk way surface but there were also other sources of funding from for example charities sponsoring greater access. Overall, there was scope for further design work where greater strength was needed and he would take all the comments into account. It was also suggested that the coming designation of most of the river wall paths as part of England's Coast Path might just provide a little more funding.

5.8 TB thanked GB for his very full briefing. The proposed launch to the community in September was a bit later than he had envisaged but having heard the plans he thought that would be a suitable time. In addition, he suggested that it would be helpful to engage the communities in the lower estuary at an early stage about all that was being thought about. It was agreed that the next AOC meeting towards the end of June would focus on the Lower Estuary design, with exception reporting only for the Upper Estuary, and all representatives, communities

and organisations should be invited to it so that there was early engagement and understanding. All Lower Estuary bodies in particular would be invited to encourage a good attendance of their local communities so that as many people as possible could be involved.

**Action: TB, AA, all Lower Estuary**

**representatives**

## **6. Funding arrangements for the Estuary Embankment Improvements**

6.1 JM explained that the Alde and Ore Estuary Trust had been established to raise funds to upgrade and enhance the river walls where government funds were not available.

6.2 The Trust had funded the development of the Upper Estuary Business Case and would stand ready to support the Lower Estuary business case if the Environment Agency (EA) money of £100,000 already secured, mentioned by GB, was not sufficient. For the Upper Estuary community contribution, an EA requirement, a grant had been awarded by the Garfield Weston Foundation: £600,000 including the matching local contribution of £100,000 required for the last tranche.

6.3 Now that EA and RFCC funds for phase 1 had been secured, she was pleased that fund raising could go ahead. The Trust were looking to a wide range of sources:-

- many people in the estuary communities were able and willing to contribute and some had pledged significant amounts. The plans for approaching them could now move forward and the Trust was using the services of fundraising consultants;

- trusts, foundations and the Heritage Lottery Fund would give grants or loans for landscape work. On the HLF, the Trust had held a successful workshop in 2017 on a possible estuary project bid but then HLF revised their programmes. More recently HLF had again put forward a scheme involving landscape and the environment which was promising. To secure such money there would need to be robust evidence of community commitment. It was hoped that further meetings with the community, for example the one proposed in June, would bring forward ideas and involvement from people in the community with additional projects related to the rivers. If the June meeting suggested there was enthusiasm for such projects, a workshop similar to that in 2017 to help get the Lottery Funding bid underway and secure commitment would be scheduled;

- another funding source was to address particular grant-giving schemes where aspects of the bank improvements could be specified, such as accessibility to an area, paths, wheelchair tracks and more, offered opportunity for some fund raising

- The Trust was also working with Coastal Partnership East to look at a range of funds for the estuary.

6.4 The AOET had launched a new web site with information about the estuary, the upgraded wall and the special habitats which need protecting and enhancing. She encouraged all to visit it at [www.aoetrust.org](http://www.aoetrust.org)

6.5 JM also hoped that the AOCP web site could have a short explanatory note on the Estuary Plan to explain those parts of the Plan which were now out of date, such as costings overtaken by inflation, the lead body and methods of fundraising. TB agreed that could be done soon, before the full review of the Plan. (see next item)

## **7. Reviews related to the Alde and Ore Estuary Plan**

### **i. Estuary Plan review**

7.1 TB said, as had been discussed at the last meeting, that certain aspects of the Estuary Plan needed updating. He offered to chair a small review team to look at the Plan and identify what needed changing, no longer applied and new factors since it was written, and where needed prepare new texts. Volunteers to work on this review were EG, JM, FB, AA.

7.2 It was noted that the Plan was still a document of material consideration in planning terms. The intention of the review was to provide readers with an updated context but the essential principles behind the plan to protect the area through resilience defences remained the same: the intention was not to change the basic approach and principles of the plan, but to update, where necessary, background, mechanisms and costings information to enable the Plan to continue as a live document. Such a review was timely as the Plan provided for 10 yearly reviews.

**Action: TB AA**

### **ii. Monitoring and review strategy re coastal squeeze**

AA said that in 2020, (minutes 17 September 2020) AOCP had noted the requirement in the Estuary Plan, on which approval had been given, to provide clear benchmark data to enable the assessment of the impact of coastal squeeze over the years, arising from the combination of retaining the walls and rising sea level, and that should damage be found to saltings, replacement habitat would need to be found. She noted that Natural England had agreed that the need for such additional habitat would take into account the growing saltings in Hazlewood

Marshes which had been newly flooded at the time the plan was drawn up. There had been a hiatus in completing the first five-year report caused by Covid in particular, but she would reconvene the Monitoring and Review Group to complete the work done in the 4 years up to 2020, which had developed a spreadsheet of all the relevant surveys made over the years, that could be drawn upon to measure key features set out by NE, by the end of 2023. Thereafter, the 5 yearly reviews would be enabled to map the impact of coastal squeeze and prompt mitigatory plans if needed. Noted that this basic data work could help inform ESIDB's planning for the lower estuary.

**Action: AA**

## **8. Possible code of conduct for leisure pursuits in and around the rivers**

- 8.1. TB reported that he had met with RSPB and SWT, as he had undertaken at the last AOCF. It was clear that some activity, particularly speeding boats and some river trips, was detrimental to wildlife. Taking action neither fell to AOCF which, with its focus on flood defence, was wary of being drawn to far into this, nor to these wildlife organisations. It had been agreed that the best way forward would be to take advantage of an East Suffolk Council project which had S. 106 funding, RAMS, the Suffolk Coast Recreation Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS): that had been set up to deal with greater footfall in wild areas coming from further housing developments, and its approach could include officers who provided advice and guidance on how to treat an area sympathetically to those arriving to explore areas. TB was meeting the RAMS staff shortly to get this taken forward.
- 8.2. CG mentioned the National Trust 'card' advising on environmentally sympathetic access to Orfordness, circulated to people coming to relax on and around the river, as an example of useful communications.
- 8.3. EG asked, given the publicity being given nationally and in the Deben to increasing pollution in rivers, whether the AOCF should address water quality on the Alde and Ore. AA said that a team of volunteers under the Alde & Ore Association had been set up and were collecting and testing samples regularly from different parts of the river. Since the initial one-year pilot began in the autumn, the findings were very little e-coli and not extreme levels of nitrates, the pollutants selected as most pressing and possible for amateurs to test. At Slaughden the water was found to be very clean. Possible other matters to investigate suggested at the meeting were phosphates and any impact of the sewage outflows near Orford. Noted that a fish survey a few years ago indicated Alde waters were clean.

## **9. Communications**

AA said that meetings were being set up in April between AOCF Comms, AOET, ESIDB and CPE to help prepare for the September estuary wide community meeting about the embankment improvement projects, progress and programme, and web site material, and would draw on the poster material the AOCF had already seen and commented on.

## **10. AOCF Admin Finance**

- i. Expenditure in the last three months was £150 for web site updating and maintenance was noted.
- ii. The grant from the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee providing £2500 for AOCF expenses was in the pipeline to the AOCF's Building Society account. DK was thanked for ensuring its passage via EA payment system. Noted that these funds would be helpful for any administration or costs relating to the communication with the local communities about the estuary embankment improvements.

## **11. Any other business**

As Peter Palmer was retiring from being an Aldeburgh Town councillor, TB thanked him very much for his regular contributions to partnership meetings over the years.

## **12. Date of Next meeting**

The next meeting would be on **Thursday 22 June 2023 or 29 June at 6.30pm, and, subject to checking, in Orford Town Hall**

**Now confirmed as Thursday 29 June 2023 at 6.30pm in Orford Town Hall**

AA

3 May 2023