

# ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

DRAFT MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE ALDE AND ORE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP HELD ON THURSDAY 29 JUNE 2023 AT 6.30PM IN ORFORD TOWN HALL

## PRESENT:

Nominated representatives

Tim Beach (TB) Chairman	Cllr. Snape Parish Council
Julia Ewart (JE)	Cllr. East Suffolk Council
Jocelyn Bond (JB)	Cllr. Aldeburgh TC
Peter McGinity (PM)	Chillesford Parish Meeting
Edward Greenwell (EG)	IDB alternate
Alison Andrews (AA)	Alde and Ore Association
Frances Barnwell (FB)	Vice Chairman AOCF

## ADVISERS/ATTENDEES:

Giles Bloomfield (GB)	East Suffolk Water Management Board (ESWMB)
David Kemp (DK)	Environment Agency (EA)
Jane Maxim (JM)	Alde and Ore Estuary Trust (AOET)
Sharon Richardson (SR)	Coastal Partnership East (CPE)

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 31

## AGENDA

**1. Apologies:** Andrew Reid Cllr Suffolk County Council; Katie Graham Cllr ESC; Ben Coulter repr. Butley, Capel St Andrew and Wantisden PC; Boyton PC rep ; Gary Wingrove Orford and Gedgrave PC; Jeremy Hinvre Iken PC; Oliver Morgan Tunstall PC; Bill Parker Sudbourne PC; Jane Skepper IDB Alternate; Ed Boyle Natural England; Harry Young Business Representative. Chris Gill AOCF Treasurer

### 2. Declarations of interest

No new declarations of interest.

### 3. Minutes of the meeting on 30 March 2023

These were agreed with the change in para 5.5 replacing £12 million with £10 million which covered known indicative direct grants, and not other potential sources.

### 4. Matters arising from the meeting on 30 March 2023 not otherwise on the agenda

David McGinity (Butley) noted that in para 5.4 on the Lower Estuary Outline Business Case saltings were mentioned and that GB would be having discussions with EA and NE. He said that the MMO (Marine Management Organisation ) needed to be involved as well as the MMO had a few years back blocked a saltings restoration project. DK (EA) said that matters with the MMO had improved a little but MMO only had powers below the High Water mark: the important thing was that EA and NE started off from a good basis.

### 5. LOWER ESTUARY PREPARATIONS FOR THE PHASE 2 ESTUARY EMBANKMENT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

5.1. GB began by giving a brief account of progress to date on the whole estuary project. The original partnership began work on an estuary plan in 2012. He mentioned the 2013 storm surge that had helped focus minds. The final Estuary Plan was endorsed by the necessary authorities in 2016. The ESWMB was involved in delivery of the plan. As an RMA( flood Risk Management Authority) the ESWMB had considerable legal powers to organise civil engineering projects such as the estuary plan . The Coastal Partnership East were providing the communications expertise to get information out to communities so everyone knew what was going on.

5.2 The plan was firmly based on the principle of a resilience approach for the whole estuary and that remains the case. The next step towards implementation was conducting hydraulic modelling to help plan the order in which the different parts of the estuary should be done. The modelling had been costly, some £150,000, but

much of this had been met by Tidal Lagoon Power who were looking for alternative mudflats to replace those that would be lost if the Cardiff power project came off. The modelling had however shown that knocking holes in some walls to create mudflats had an adverse effect on neighbouring areas and in fact confirmed that, given the elongated shape of the estuary, all the walls needed to be mended because all the flood cells were interlinked. So, the aim is to hold the line except where there is already a breach at Hazlewood and the separate works on Havergate and Orfordness defences. More detailed modelling followed to establish the order of upgrading the flood cells and involved different permutations of single or groups of cells at a time or some together. This included ensuring that no dwelling would be likely to be more flooded during the works than would have been the case if no action was taken: this could not be avoided entirely for about 4 homes only, but the owners had said go ahead with the works. The results showed the way forward had to be start in the upper estuary and then move to the lower estuary.

5.3 The next step had been to examine the economic and environmental opportunities and losses if the project went ahead. He showed slides (which are on [www.aocp.co.uk](http://www.aocp.co.uk) web site) detailing the likely number of residences and other buildings and valuable assets such as water bore holes that might be lost in the upper and lower estuary were the flood defences not upgraded. He added that in current times with concerns about the shortage of water it was relevant that in all parts of the estuary there were water abstraction points protected by the flood defences which were very valuable assets providing water for irrigation for valuable food production. In the upper estuary the costs overall of the works would be about £12 million but would yield a return of for every pound spent of as much as 10: 1 in saved benefits to the economy or damaged avoided.

5.4 In the lower estuary the planned work had to deal with FC4 which was a problem because it was so long and had to be done as a single unit.. The lower estuary had 33km of river defences which, if not repaired, could result in the loss of assets including some 205 residences, 98 other buildings, 35 water extraction points and overall, the beneficial return would be 2.5:1. While a less high payback than for the Upper Estuary, the cost benefit was still above the level of 1:1 on which government grants were being paid out. He added that the government criteria did not take into account that the renewed walls would also provide further economic opportunities such as restoration of old buildings or supplies for freshwater in the ditches behind the walls so that the overall benefit of investing in improved defences would be higher.. He mentioned also that the recent UNESCO bid developed by the RSPB for the East Coast Flyway (East Coast Wetlands running from the Humber past Felixstowe into Essex and the Thames to the south)(<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/rspb-news/rspb-news-stories/east-coast-wetlands/>)which further enhances the conservation area of international status being very important in the lifecycle of many migrating bird species and associated increase in eco-tourism, would also add strength to the case for government and other grants.

5.5 He explained the engineering design for the preferred option for the improved walls, with heights of around 3.3m ( it would vary a little around the estuary), a broad top/crest and relaxed extended back face down which any surge water could flow without damaging the walls and then be led away, and can be adapted in the medium term, the next 20 to 50 years. The robust design also allowed for easy repairs and maintenance in the future and even in places for slightly higher walls to be built if needed.

5.6. On funding, Government money came via the RFCC from local levies, from Other Government Department Funds, as well as from direct grants for flood prevention works. In addition, there was the Public Works Loan of £3 million which landowners were already paying off through the annual drainage board levies over 30 years. For the whole estuary there was a £20 million funding gap but that included a large contingency reserve. The AOET would be working to secure funds needed to fill the gap not met by government funds. It was a dedicated charity which gave huge benefits in terms of taxation.

5.7 On timelines the whole estuary project should take 8 years. The upper estuary preparation works were in hand this year so that actual construction would start in 2024. Meanwhile work on getting the full details of the lower estuary was underway. He recommended the AOE Trust web site as providing very useful background. He confirmed that flood modelling had shown that it was not possible to stop the project having done the upper estuary as the lower estuary also needed a similar improvement- it was a whole estuary plan .

5.8 GB was asked about the erosion of the shingle line south of the Martello Tower around Sudbourne beach. He explained that the haul road which had been along the top of the shingle beach had never been a sea defence but the road to get down to Cobra Mist. The natural flood system was the shingle beach which lay on top of a wide berm of clay . For there to be a breach into the river, the sea would need to displace all the shingle and cut

through the clay layer down to the bed of the estuary channel, some 5-6 metres, 15-20 feet from the top of the wall, which was unlikely to happen. What was happening at present was that shingle was being pushed over and pillowing on the marshes behind. This was very similar to what had occurred at the Dingle Marshes a few years ago. The aim was a lower profile with a shingle shape like an aircraft wing, and so to achieve a hydraulic balance (drown out) sooner in more extreme events. He did not think there was anything to worry about, and how it developed could be the subject of another conversation in many years ahead. DK confirmed that EA were regularly monitoring the shoreline (as well as the frequent citizen science photos by Roger Baxter and Simon Reed) so EA were always looking out should something be going wrong. For that area to breach would require a very unusual storm with the strength to destroy Great Yarmouth. Professor Pye, in his 2016 report, had estimated that even if the shingle disappeared, any more dramatic changes would not be for 15-20 years so there was time to take action. Also, the crescent shape of the shoreline area meant that while the shingle was displaced over the ridge by northeast winds, winds flowing direct from the south or north would replenish the shingle in the crescent.

5.9 GB was asked if the plans included Shingle Street and said that the plan was to bring all the walls from Shingle Street all the way up the river to the same standard. There could also be opportunities to do more with enhancing freshwater wetland habitats both at Boyton and up at Iken. He added that the newly improved walls at Aldeburgh Marshes, as well as taking advantage of government funding post the 2013 floods, had enabled them to get a good understanding of what needed to be done and the costs of clay wall upgrading.

## **6. Update on the roll out of the Upper Estuary Embankment Improvement Programme**

6.1GB said that the preparations for the phase 1 Upper Estuary Embankment Improvements were well underway led by Pete Roberts, the delivery engineer, who had also led the Aldeburgh wall project. Construction work was due to start next year.

6.2 GB confirmed that the clay to build the walls in the upper and lower estuary would be taken from the fields behind the walls: this was the least costly way to do it and there was another plus as that would create at the same time huge ditches holding a reservoir of freshwater meeting needs in this area of increasing drought)

6.3 TB thanked Giles for both his presentations. He said that the whole point of this meeting was to reassure people that the intention was to see the whole estuary plan through to the end: people had doubted that the money was there but the assessment of the project showed that it stacked up economically as well as environmentally- it was doable. He also expressed his appreciation of the professionalism and co-operation between GB and DK, the long-standing partnership and that was the best proof that the project would work.

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

TB reported on his follow-up meeting exploring the possibility of a possible code of conduct for leisure pursuits in and around the rivers. Most recently he had met with an officer 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; its approach could include officers who provided advice and guidance to those arriving to explore areas on how to treat an area sympathetically. It looked possible that a code could be developed for all Suffolk estuaries.

## **8. Communications- including virtual exhibition of the Estuary Project**

8.1. SR said that the major open day on the whole Estuary wall improvement programme for anyone who wanted to attend would be on Saturday 7 October 2023 in the Britten Studio, and would involve an exhibition as well as discussion and presentation events.

8.2. SR then explained the communications plan. Coastal Partnership East, a coastal management team operating from North Norfolk to Felixstowe, had links with the ESWMB and the several estuary partnerships. CPE was, like the ESWMB, an RMA capable of organising coastal protection projects and offering solutions to coastal erosion. CPE had an engineering team, a funding and strategy team and a partnerships and engagement team. For the next stage in the Alde and Ore Estuary programme CPE were putting together material from AOCPE, AOET and the ESWMB in order to prepare a complete explanation of what was proposed. There would be a video, an exhibition and a virtual exhibition which would make the material easily accessible online for those who could not attend events. The aim was to raise awareness, to show what the future would or could look like and generally increase understanding of what was happening in both the Upper and Lower Estuary. She gave a demonstration of how the virtual exhibition would work, including it

offering an opportunity to look at overview and detailed papers behind the programme. Visitors would be able to provide comment and feedback so the virtual exhibition could be adjusted to meet comments and concerns. The overall aim was accessibility to knowing what was going on, openness on all the detail and transparency. To reach the target market a wide range of tools would be used including social media, AOCP, AOET, ESWMB and other emailing groups/circulations, plus posters and web sites.

- 8.3. GB added that ESWMB had a comms plan which included when they needed to explain what construction was taking place where and traffic movements in the area, having meetings with individual local parishes or in any format that was needed. This would be in addition to the two-monthly information letters they had started to send out.
- 8.4. TB added that AOCP officers had already met with a number of parish representatives to bring them up to date and invite further engagement.
- 8.5. TB was asked whether it was really understood how people locally felt about the plans. In the discussion that followed it was recognised that the need for an estuary wide plan had emerged after 18 months of intensive working groups under the aegis of the Alde and Ore Futures, then a group of working groups working on each flood cell while the plan was being drawn up and consultation days on the plan. TB said that the aim now was to increase awareness and hopefully engagement. JE commented that as people were far more aware now of environmental issues, that issue provided another opportunity for wider promotion. JM commented that it was local money that had enabled the detailed construction plan to be funded and all the bodies involved in the estuary would be working to create greater awareness and appreciation of what was being done.

## 9. Updating the Estuary Plan

7.1 TB said the AOCP had recognised that certain aspects of the Estuary Plan needed updating and he would be conducting a review of it. The essential aim of the plan to achieve resilience flood defences remained the same but some detailed aspects needed reviewing. He would shortly be calling 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 so far EG, JM, FB, AA.

**Action:**

**TB AA**

## 10. AOCP Admin Finance

- i. Expenditure in the last three months of £150 for web site updating and maintenance was noted.
- ii. the next bill was the hire of the Orford Town Hall for the present meeting which had kindly been provided at half price.
- iii. noted that the AOCP held the monies previously held by the earlier Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership and grants kindly provided by the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

## 11. Any other business

Charles Croydon (AONB volunteer) alerted the meeting to the following:

- i. the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-2028 was out for public consultation until 21 July  
<https://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/managing/management-plan/management-plan-consultation/>
- ii. the Suffolk Wader Strategy: a successful partnership project (AONB, RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the East Suffolk IDB) had involved the creation of 5,480m of foot drains on multiple nature reserves on the Suffolk coast. This will help to provide optimum conditions for foraging breeding waders such as redshank, lapwing, avocet and over-wintering ducks and geese. More information here: <https://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/managing/farming-in-protected-landscapes/projects-approved/farming-in-protected-landscapes-case-study-footdrain-on-the-suffolk-coast/>

## 12. Date of next meetings

**Saturday 7 October 2023 Alde and Ore Estuary Project Launch at Snape** Maltings (all day- exhibition, talks and discussion)

**Thursday 25 January 2024 at 6.30pm. next regular AOCP meeting**

AA

30 June 2023/10 July