

The Deben Estuary Partnership Newsletter

Issue 1: Spring 2009

Welcome to our first Deben Estuary Partnership Newsletter

Like the rest of the Suffolk coast our rivers will face many challenges in the coming years. Aware of the necessity to find a new and positive way of tackling such significant issues as sea level rise, increased visitor numbers and the thorny problem of maintaining river walls in good order, a small group of interested representatives came together last autumn to talk about how all those involved in the estuary could work together.

With the help and guidance of the River Deben Association, Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit and Suffolk Coastal District Council, a successful Forum in November saw representatives of some 60 organisations, communities and landowners come together to learn what was happening elsewhere, to hear from the Environment Agency (EA) and to consider what is valued about the Deben Estuary. From that meeting the Deben Estuary Partnership is growing slowly and steadily.

The philosophy of the partnership will be to work with others and take a step by step constructive approach to dealing with the issues and problems that are identified. Maintenance of river walls has been seen as a first priority and EA representatives spent a chilly day on the river in February looking at sites, each suffering from a different kind of problem, and talking to landowners about how they could undertake repair work for which the EA no longer has adequate funding. Previously tricky and time consuming difficulties – such as the difference between maintenance and improvement - are being defined and resolved; a protocol and easy to use paper work will soon help landowners through the technical stages of applying for consent to undertake repairs. We see these initiatives as the

very early stages of a new, more straightforward working partnership with the Environment Agency.

The Deben Estuary Partnership (DEP) believes promoting better communication and ensuring that river communities and statutory organisations understand each other's views will be vital. At the Forum meeting last year many representatives of various groups said that they would like to be involved further. We hope gradually to draw these people into the debate on future strategies for the Estuary – it will be as important to work with bodies such as Natural England as it will be to appreciate the needs of those whose livelihoods are based on the water.

I trust this, our first newsletter, will tell you what we have done over recent months and give a flavour of the partnership ethos we believe will be all important in the future.

Christine Block

Chair, Deben Estuary Partnership

Deben Estuary Site Visits

Thank you to the organisers and all who came and braved the cold and rain, it was a great opportunity to meet landowners and people with an interest in the estuary. The site visits promoted useful discussion about expectation and delivery and we left each site with agreed actions. I felt that by the end of the day there was a much greater awareness of the challenges facing all of us and the estuary and an awakening feeling that in the future the best solutions would be found by working together.

Mike Steen

Suffolk Coastal Advisor for the Environment Agency

A New way of working on the Deben

The EA has indicated over some years that a number of flood defences will not be maintained.

The areas behind these flood defence walls are very special to the community due to their very varied habitats and strong economic value to the local and wider economy.

In the interest of addressing the major concern of managing the flood defences, the DEP organised a number of site visits with EA engineers, coastal specialists and the planning and consents team. The aim of the day was to air concerns and to reduce the misunderstandings surrounding owner maintenance of sea walls. The four site visits with landowners have reduced the uncertainty of the process landowners will have to go through and has opened up a support system for technical advice on how best to replace and repair missing blocks and eroded footpaths.

The problem has mainly been in identifying what is maintenance and what is improvement of a defence. Replacing blocks and filling in low points is usually a maintenance issue needing permission from the EA which is also the case for improvement of a sea wall. However, the EA want to work with landowners to make this process simpler and welcome the opportunity to offer advice.

The EA have since received offers from local landowners to carry out urgent localised maintenance. This will make a very positive contribution to current management.

Bill Waring Local Landowner and **Trazar Astley-Reid** Suffolk Estuaries Officer

Linking up the Suffolk Coast

The tidal surge in November 2007 brought to the fore the challenges facing the Suffolk coast and estuaries. It reinforced the message that not any one specific organisation or agency has sole

responsibility to manage the coast but it actually rests with all of us to work together. In Suffolk, the District and County Councils, EA, Natural England, East of England Development Agency and the Government Office East have created the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Initiative to bring these organisations together and focus on resolving the issues on our vulnerable coastline. However, these organisations cannot shape the future of the coast and estuaries alone, the local community views are essential and therefore the Deben Estuary Partnership is a vital link between those organisations with duties and powers and the individuals and communities on the Deben. It is still very early days but good progress is being made so that we can collectively face the challenges ahead.

Bill Parker Suffolk ICZMI

Can we halt salt marsh erosion on the Deben?

If you stand on the Woodbridge waterfront and look across to the Sutton shore you will see a dark structure marked by three isolated danger marks. This is what is called a 'Tide Attenuation Barrier' and was constructed by the River Deben Association (RDA). For years the Sutton shore has been subject to erosion by the ebbing tides. This has caused the footpath to the ferry to be eroded, rendering any renewal of the service highly unlikely. Some four years ago the RDA decided to take on the task of trying to prevent further erosion and if possible to encourage deposition to rebuild the salt marsh. Without going into great detail, a long process of discovery began; how could we do it, who owned the land etc? After discussions with the National Trust (the land owner) and many others the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit offered' us a grant of £2500 towards the likely costs. The RDA has agreed to monitor the scheme over the next five years to ascertain how much mud is being deposited and is also looking into ways of regenerating the salt marsh. The RDA would welcome your ideas.

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