

The Deben Estuary Partnership Newsletter

Issue 3: Spring 2010

Young Free and Shingle

The children of Bawdsey primary school will be making tracks down to Bawdsey quay in June for a day out with the Suffolk Estuaries Officer from Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Unit to learn all about the shingle, mud, saltmarsh and marine wildlife living in and around the Deben.

The DEP hopes to have more days like this with other schools around the Deben, where John White (Harbour Master at Felixstowe Ferry) or other members of the DEP will lead others in exploring areas of the Deben. **Trazar Astley-Reid Suffolk Estuaries Officer**

A Day out on the Farm



Much of the land around the Deben is privately owned and provides valuable areas for food production and habitat for wildlife.

The landowners in the DEP are organising an evenings trail for the Parish Councils around some of the land skirting the Deben to illustrate the importance of these areas and the issues surrounding agricultural production, important water resources and climate change.

Deben Estuary Partnership Farm Walk
June 24th 5.45pm for a 6.00pm start
meeting at Low Farm Ufford

We hope that representatives of local Councils and community groups can come along and learn about farming in the local area.

Christine Block

Restoring Saltmarsh on the Deben

The saltmarsh working group's main aim is to explore potential for management of saltmarsh to care for areas of saltmarsh we still have. Having identified two areas of saltmarsh on the Deben in need of attention, we are working with Andrew Hawes of Hawes Associates in Aldeburgh to carry out a feasibility study.

The two sites are the marsh below Cross Farm directly upriver from Waldringfield, and the large flooded field below Sutton Hoo. The preferred solution is to restrict the flow of the tide in and out of the two sites by putting in sills that will restrict the outflow of the tide at low water and therefore encourage silt to settle out. This is a precondition for establishing saltmarsh. At present, as breaches become wider and deeper, the dynamic flow of the tide through the marsh area has tended to accelerate erosion.

Building on the experimental work carried out by the River Deben Association, we intend to put in place brushwood fence structures to prevent the tide from flowing freely through the sites on the ebb.

In the breaches we plan to use locally-won river sediment to form sills that will follow the contours of the river bed.

By carrying out this work, we will not only be enhancing the habitat value of the saltmarsh sites, but we also expect that it will be beneficial for boatyards in the immediate vicinity and downstream to have less sediment washing out of the Sutton Hoo Marsh.

So far this project has received enthusiastic support from the Environment Agency (EA), Natural England, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Unit, Suffolk County Council, The Crown Estates and National Trust. Since managing existing saltmarsh sites is a new initiative, we are confident that these works are well placed to attract full funding. We are therefore taking our plans forward with the intention of applying for the necessary permissions and licences in the near future.

Simon Read

River Deben Footpaths

There is nothing better than walking along the footpaths beside the estuary of the River Deben. On the landward side is the attractive countryside of farmland landscape,

Making connections, establishing links

home to many species of wildlife, while across the saltings is the tidal estuary alive with pleasure boats and the home of many other birds species. Above is the wide-open sky for which East Anglia is so rightly famous.

For centuries the river-walls have been looked on as being little more than rather dull earthworks defending land against high tides. Now it is increasingly being realised that they are very much part of our heritage and vital to the wildlife and commercial life of the Deben valley. The river walls protect agricultural land that brings some £4m per year into the local economy. The Suffolk coast has become a major vegetable growing area largely due to the water stored in irrigation ponds behind the walls. Also many rare species depend on the fresh water habitat of the marshes and low-lying ground protected by the walls.

The walling of the Deben marshes took place piece meal over a period of around three hundred years. In the mid-medieval period the monastic orders and powerful landowners started to wall off saltings to create summer grazing for their large flocks of sheep, cattle and horses. Although the powerful landowners owned this new grazing land the actual work of throwing up the dirt banks appear to have been done by their tenants. Local men, working with shovels, walled off incredibly large areas. It was a tremendous achievement.

The Deben probably took on its present shape in the Elizabethan times when there was another period of land hunger and national optimism. The maintenance of the river walls has been the source of endless disputes ever since they were built, but they have played a major part in the development and character of the area.

If the heart of the River Deben is the tideway in the main channel, then the river wall footpaths are the touch-lines from which all the river and its valley can be observed. For this reason the Deben Estuary Partnership has recruited volunteers to walk along the paths to make reports of the state of the walls and countryside around it.

Robert Simper

Proposed work of new Access Group

Representatives from Parishes will be looking for balanced solutions to problems of pressure on the Deben Estuary. The Access Group will act as a forum to discuss issues and conflicts, associated with recreation and access that arise in the estuary area.

Facts, Figures and Finance

Preparatory work is underway for an Estuarine Strategy for the River Deben

The Data Group is a group of individuals who have been drawn together to pool local knowledge and contacts within the area and further afield. One of their tasks is to examine the information that is used to make decisions about the river.

The Environment Agency has recently completed a survey of the heights of the flood defences and has produced maps, showing the location of each river wall and the area it protects. This survey information will be shared with local landowners. The Data Group aims to check the survey maps and survey data, by carrying out some commonsense cross-checking in conjunction with the wall condition monitoring to be carried out by the Access Group. The Access Group will walk the walls twice yearly and record maintenance problems. This information will be shared with the Environment Agency.

The next stage in drawing up the Estuarine Strategy is the preparation and distribution of a Scoping Consultation Document. This consultation will be used to ensure that the Environmental Assessment for the Strategy covers all relevant topics. **Mike Steen EA and Melanie Poole DEP**

Funding for walls

How and where to find funding for wall maintenance?

The days when the EA could fund all necessary maintenance work are over – like Local Government, they must manage with far less money. To tackle the problem of how to fund both maintenance and other estuary initiatives a 'Coastal Funding Workshop' was held recently. Representatives from a wide range of organisations set out to share existing knowledge and think about new ways of finding money. An important point from the discussions was that, if we can't rely on traditional sources of finance, we will need to develop new, innovative ideas including

- Building 'self-financing' estuary walls – using licensed waste that would otherwise go to landfill – as is proposed for walls along the Blyth Estuary
- Using money raised through enabling development
- Developing long term revenue streams – perhaps from renewable energy sources

At the end of the morning it was agreed that more work was needed on some of the new funding ideas and that a second event should offer guidance about consents and planning procedure required for maintenance work on walls. **Call Bill Parker, SCDC, Tel : 01394 444553**