



Our Homes
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Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group. **Newsletter No 6 November 2011.**

Despite the national gloom, some progress for the Levels.....

Welcome to our 2011 newsletter. When we last wrote to you -twelve months ago, we were reflecting with both apprehension and interest on what the change of government and the economic crisis might mean for the Minsmere Levels and their coastline. We hope that MLSG has made its own modest contribution to the fact that so far things have not turned out as badly as we had feared. Over the last year we have collaborated increasingly with the Internal Drainage Board and the RSPB in our representations, and have been encouraged that the Environment Agency appears increasingly willing to listen to, and communicate with, us. The new Sizewell C nuclear development, the eventual loss of the North Marsh and the future of the Minsmere sluice have continued to be our major preoccupations, as they are likely to remain for some years.

The Nuclear Development at Sizewell C

We have reported previously on our responses to the successive central government consultations on the possible Sizewell development which over the year have moved closer to becoming a reality. From the start of these discussions, MLSG has been strictly neutral on the arguments for and against the Government's policy on nuclear power and this will remain our position. Our concerns are entirely focussed on the impact that any development will have on the Minsmere Levels and their coastline over the short, medium and long term. We were heartened when the two local representatives of EDF, the probable developers of the site, attended our public meeting on June and introduced themselves and made it clear that they wished to open a dialogue with MLSG at a very early stage, even though formal consultation was not planned to start until March 2012

We therefore co-ordinated a meeting at EDF's new offices in Leiston at which the IDB and RSPB joined us. This was very much a preliminary discussion which allowed us to outline the issues that we felt would need to be covered in the statutory consultation. These included as the impact on the shoreline and the sluice of the temporary docking pier (*what is it called?*) Required during the construction, the probable increased flow through the sewage works which will result from a workforce of several thousand, and the longer term impact of the further reinforcement of the site and the new access road causeway on both the inland water system and the coastline. We stressed that from the outset of the consultation we would be concerned to learn how EDF intended to

mitigate the consequences of the development on these and other aspects of the fragile Minsmere environment in accordance with their obligations under section 106 (*of what act??*)

We were glad that EDF appeared to recognise that the environmental impact of the development would have to be one of the highest priorities in the consultation process. They indicated that their specialists were already undertaking a range of studies investigating both off shore tidal process as well as inland water flow and soil structure and that these would become public at the start of the consultation.

There will in fact be two consultative stages over 2 to 3 years in both of which flood risk assessments will be a key component. The second stage will focus on EDF's response to the issues raised by the first phase. The outcome of this second stage of consultation will then be presented alongside EDF's formal application for consideration by the Infrastructure Planning Commission, or its successor body, a process which is likely to last a year. It is hoped that construction of the station itself will start in 2015 to be completed by 2022 and the plant will be in production by 2025. The preparatory groundworks and the work on the new causeway, both of which may have a major impact on the Levels, may start well before 2011. This means that Sizewell C presents immediate issues for MLSG.

The consultative process is being piloted at EDF's other nuclear development at Hinckley in Somerset, where EDF hope that it will be possible to iron out many of the glitches that reveal themselves. EDF seemed very receptive to the idea that reports from their specialists on the outcome of their studies should form a major part of the agenda for the MLSG annual public meeting in June next year.

The North Marsh

The proposal within the Shoreline Management Review that the coastline of the North Marsh should no longer be actively protected is one which MLSG has reluctantly accepted as the "least worst" option. The gain will be the reduction of the pressure on, and consequent erosion of, Dunwich Cliffs to the north and the remaining Minsmere coastline to the south. The timescale over which the North Marsh will develop will depend greatly on tidal events but the experience to date suggests that at the northern end of the marsh a substantial shingle bank is moving inwards and reinforcing the banks that hitherto have been the secondary defences. This may be mirroring the experience on the Dingle Marshes to the north of Dunwich where the consequence of the policy of no active intervention appears to have resulted in a comparable landward move of the shingle banks which have in practice only been overtopped by the sea on the occasion of exceptional tidal events.

The news that the Environment Agency had secured the funds for the work on the reinforcement of the Coney Hill Bank at the southern end of the Marsh to be undertaken in the current year was very welcome as this was the only way that the rest of the Minsmere Levels were to be protected in the long term given the policy of no active intervention on the coastline to the north. It is good to be able to report that good weather has allowed to progress ahead of schedule and that it is now nearing completion. The bank itself has been raised in height by up to one metre and widened by ?? Metres, work that has involved importing large quantities of clay through the narrow road into the RSPB Minsmere reserve. It was initially thought that this could require up to 1000 large truck loads, although in the event only around 300 have been required, and the disruption to both the reserve and the surrounding communities has been much less than had been previously feared. The work has also involved the construction of a much larger culvert (*what is it called*) to control the flow of

water from the marsh into the reserve's "Scrape" on the south side of the bank. It has also involved the positioning of two "bunds" at right angles to the sea walls on their seaward side (*David – please elaborate and insert pictures and plan- copy displayed in the EA newsletter so small that scripts is almost illegible*)

The Future of the Minsmere Sluice

From its inception MLSG has been much concerned about the condition sluice. In last year's newsletter we reported that during the early summer of 2010, Jacobs Engineering and Reds Divers had undertaken an internal investigation of the chamber and the sluices and taken detailed measurements and dimensions. As a result the EA has told us that it is forming a scope of works and design in preparation for a construction programme which will include

1. Replacing all three gates – Scot's Head Drain, the New Cut and Leiston Ditch, designing them in such a way as to require minimum maintenance so that the need for access to the chamber will be reduced.
2. The inclusion of eel passages in all three gates
3. the repair of all failing brickwork and damaged concrete inside the chamber
4. The design of safe access for maintenance into the chamber – i.e. platform, ladders, devit points.

The EA proved unable, as originally hoped, to fund these works in the current financial year, but it seems confident that it will be able to do so in 2012. However, as this appeared to represent an essentially short, and possibly medium, term remedial programme MLSG has to establish what these investigations revealed about the long term future of the sluice.

We therefore enquired further of Mark Johnson, the Environment Agency's Area Coastal Manager. He responded that the remaining residual life of the Minsmere Sluice structure would be determined by two mutually exclusive factors - the failure of the seaward end of the outfall due to coastal erosion and the structural failure of any point of the main sluice. The investigations had involved dewatering the sluice chamber and a visual inspection of the entire structure. The inspector had found no significant reasons for concern regarding the integrity of the structure. Mark Johnson envisaged that the programme of works outlined above would allow the Agency to maintain mechanical components and undertake repairs as and when necessary, and ensure that it was also possible to fully inspect the chamber and the outfall pipes. With this in place he said it should be possible to maintain the structure for up to 50 years.

In regard to the outfall pipe (rather than the sluice) the impact of coastal erosion was much more difficult to predict, as rates of erosion were highly variable and dependant on prevailing weather conditions. However the Agency had significantly increased the amount of coastal monitoring on the Minsmere frontage and that the data derived from this would inform the engineering options for the appropriate management of the outfall structure.

We much appreciated Mark Johnson's full response to us, and we recognise the unknowns that make the future difficult to predict., However we remain apprehensive about how the sluice in its present form will cope with the consequences of climate change –increasing rainfall inland water combined with rising sea levels rising sea levels, which will ever further restrict the periods during which the increasing flow of inland water can be discharged. We think that further pressure on the sluice could result from the construction of Sizewell C. We know *that the docking pier in place during the building of Sizewell B resulted in a change in the configuration of the sandbanks in area*

around the outfall pipe and thus had the potential to affect the free discharge from the sluice (David please amend/develop On the landward side, further pressure on the sluice could well result from any increased outflow from Leiston sewage works during the construction of Sizewell C as well and the longer term impact of the new structures on inland water volumes generally. We think that sooner rather than later it may be necessary to look to a replace power assisted system to replace the present gravity fed(is that the right terminology) arrangement ((David- can you work on this section?))

It is therefore clear that the impact of Sizewell C, both during the construction phase, and over the long term must be a central subject discussion with EDF throughout the consultation phase, and thereafter in our submissions to the Infrastructure Planning Commission.

MLSG priorities for 2012

It will be evident from what we have written above that our energies for 2012 – and for the foreseeable future- are likely to be fully consumed by Sizewell C. It is likely that this will be the major topic of our public meeting next year, when we plan to invite relevant specialists from EDF to make substantial contributions.

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