

**Note of meeting between the Environment Agency and representatives of local organisations to discuss the future of the Minsmere Sluice.**

**Theberton Jubilee Hall 10.30 on Monday 7 September 2009**

**Present**

**Mark Johnson, Area Manager, Environment Agency**  
**Giles Broomfield, Environment Agency, in charge of local operations**  
**Ian Hart, Clerk and Engineer, Internal Drainage Board**  
**Cr Marian Andrews, Suffolk Coast DC**  
**Cr Bob Perrett, Middleton Parish Council**  
**Cr Bing Boast, Leiston Town Council**  
**Cr Bill Howard, Leiston Town Council**  
**John Rayner, Clerk to Leiston Town Council**  
**Councillor Gordon Turner, Westleton Parish Council**  
**Richard Gilbert, National Trust, Dunwich**  
**Adam Rowlands, Senior Site Manager, RSPB Minsmere and local IDB representative**  
**John Keeble, Convenor MLSG**  
**Nat Bacon, MLSG**  
**David Robb, MLSG**  
**John Rea Price, Secretary, MLSG**

**After the convenor's welcome and introduction, David Robb set the scene, outlining the history and remit of MLSG, and with the help of a series of photographs and maps outlined the current issues that MLSG see as confronting the levels and in particular Minsmere Sluice.**

**Ian Hart then summarised the role of the Internal Drainage Board in maintaining those drains intermediate between the main arteries, i.e. The New Cut, the Minsmere Old River and the Leiston Main Drain (and the sluice) which were the responsibility of the Environment Agency and the smaller watercourses cared for by landowners themselves. He said that later this autumn, he was planning work on No 7 Drain, passing through Eastbridge just by the Eels Foot Inn, for which a budget of £7000 was provided. However, he said that the usefulness of this expenditure was entirely dependant on the effectiveness of the sluice in removing the water. In his recent inspection he had been very concerned at the high volume of sea water apparently entering the New Cut as a result of a fault in the gates.**

**Mark Johnson began by setting out the four sources from which the EA secured its funding for any work it undertook. These were**

- 1. The Government grant in aid, routed via DEFRA, which is currently £700 million per annum. to cover all major projects throughout England and Wales. Competition for these funds is intense, and their allocation is determined by three criteria**

- The size of the population at risk which will be safeguarded
  - The obligations under national and international conservation laws that will be met
  - The benefits outweigh cost be a ratio of 5 to 1, which created a very high threshold
2. A local levy, agreed in East Anglia with Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Southend Councils. At present this stands at £1.2 million per annum.
  3. A general drainage charge on landowners, which was raised in areas where there was no IDB (i.e. not in Suffolk)
  4. A contribution from the IDB

With its generally low level of populations at risk, it was difficult for East Anglian projects to meet the criteria for grant in aid funds, although major projects in Felixstowe and on the Norfolk Boards had secured this. The conservation criteria would improve the chances of any Minsmere project succeeding, despite our low population, as would any joint funding from another source ( e.g. Sizewell) which could reduce the benefit/cost ratio to 3 to 1

Adam Rowlands gave a brief description of the RSPB reserve, emphasising that it had to operate within the EA/IDB framework. All water drained in or out of the reserve via the Scotts Hall sluice into the main hexagon, although within the reserve area there was a network of about 100 smaller sluices. The reserve like relatively high water on the scrape in winter for waterfowl and waders, but risk factors were the intake of sea water, which required constant monitoring of salinity, and flash floods, such as those which had caused damage to bittern nests two years ago.

The RSPB had reluctantly accepted the plan to no longer defend the north marsh, but agreed with the EA that intervention by heavy equipment did more damage over the medium term than doing nothing, and allowing a natural rebuilding of shingle banks after sea breaches as was now happening both along the North Marsh as at Dingle.

Giles Bloomfield spoke specifically about his plans for the sluice. A report from consultants was awaited early next year on the refurbishment of the hexagon, repair/replacement of the faulty sluice gate and a key steel RSJ, also extensive improvements to provide safe working conditions. This work would be undertaken next financial year, funded from the local levy.

Work on clearing and securing the outlet into the sea had taken place after the November 2007 storm surge and installing new ventilation shaft and reinforcing the protection to the steel pipes with large granite blocks. This

work had proved successful. The pipes themselves had an estimated life of 15 years, but he agreed with comments that this could be 5 years either way.

In discussion of the way forward, it was agreed that the EA would produce a simple summary of their consultant's reports and recommendations, and the consequent action that was proposed in 2010/2011 and that this would be made available to all interested parties, including those present.

It was also agreed that the EA would continue to work with MLSG and other interests on developing its plans for the Levels as a whole, the sluice, and in particular the sluice, noting in particular the opportunities that may be provided for significant third party funding by any Sizewell C and D community dividend. However, the EA recognized that, if this was to stand any chance in the likely competition for funding this would require a robust and hard nosed specification of works required, rather than a mere wish list

**John Rea Price**

**8 September 2009**