

MINSMERE LEVELS STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

Notes of a meeting held at 1 Old Store Gardens, Eastbridge
21 June 2008

Attended by:

John Keeble (Convenor)
Jon Swallow
David Robb
Pauline English
Janet Lister
Stephen Brett
Nat Bacon
John Rea Price (secretary)
Judith Croton (note taker)

Adam Rowlands, Senior Site Manager, RSPB

1. The minutes of the last meeting held on 10 May were agreed as being an accurate record.
2. All matters arising were dealt with under agenda items
3. Nat Bacon, of Theberton Hall Farm, was welcomed as a new member of the planning group.
4. Coastal matters Suffolk County Council meeting, Southwold, 14 June.
JK and DR represented MLSG at the meeting – a copy of DR's notes have already been circulated. He will circulate the slides later.
The coastal defence strategy is now likely to be released in September. MLSG is now recognised as group that will be formally consulted.
Adam Rowlands comment that the Environment Agency's recommendations for Minsmere, which is a separate scheme to the general shoreline scheme, is likely to be issued for consultation at about the same time.

JK fed back that it had been reported that the Government is receiving £2M *per week* in VAT payments from dredging off the coast (coastal waters are regarded as part of the Crown Estate so the Government gets the income). The money does not get returned to the region.

5. Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Matters
JRP's notes from the inspection carried out by the District Engineer, Ian Hart, on 13 June have already been circulated. (there is an error in the notes – available funding is £3500, NOT £35,000!)

Inland water is the most important issue for today and for the public meeting on 18 July.

AR is Minsmere representative on new East Suffolk IDB.

Local landowners (NB, JK, SB on behalf of the Dowleys, AR) and JRP accompanied IH. AR provided the meeting with an update. The District engineer carried on to the Sluice and to Theberton Hall Farm and has now seen all the ditches. He will draw up a plan for slubbing (clearing out) the ditches and drains (some areas were probably not done during the work carried out 7 years ago so are in a poor state). He will convene a meeting in the autumn with group who accompanied him to see if they are happy with his plan. If it is felt that more work is needed than can be afforded within the £3500 budget (approximately 1 kilometre) he will need to work out how to raise more money, eg increase the levy on landowners, council tax etc

It was pointed out there was little point in clearing the drains if the culverts aren't also cleared, they are difficult to clear and have tended to be left in the past.

There is reason for some optimism. The work is likely to be more effective in future because there is now a group to communicate with, with active involvement of local landowners. A private contractor, rather than the EA, will do the work which is likely to be more cost effective. However, the efficiency of the IDB work is affected by the EA structure – all IDB ditches drain into the "cork in bottle", the Sluice, which is the responsibility of the EA.

AR reported that there was another meeting of the IDB yesterday. Other catchments have similar issues with EA - pumps etc. IH will raise these issues with the EA. The EA has just published a draft "catchment flood management plan" for Suffolk – it is preparing plans for the whole country but this is one of the first. It is proposing to reduce a lot of the work they do in many parts of Suffolk - the whole of the coastal plain will have reduced work. Proposals increased flood protection at Ipswich, maintaining work at Framlingham and Stowmarket, but reduced work elsewhere. This is described as a regional strategy but it has probably been drafted within the national context. IDB has responded that it is very unhappy with this. The plan is supposed to be on EA website but AR couldn't find it today. DR will follow this up.

IH has questioned whether the way the Cut is maintained is the result of a conscious strategy, from boat to use of a digger etc, It is probably a decision based on cost but conservation is used to justify it. As there has been no strategy before it hasn't been clear why things have been done as they were/are. This group that we must get them to clarify and state clearly what the strategy is. AR thought that a series of issues are coming to a head, ie the effect of inland flooding on:-

- Communities
- Agriculture
- Conservation and wildlife

DR suggested that the local wildlife groups should get together and quantify problems. AR said that it was harder for the RSPB to quantify the damage this year whereas last year bittern nests were washed away but no new nests so some damage must have been caused (please check this last bit, not sure I got it right). Six tern and avocet nests on the lagoon were lost through flooding. NB said it was also important to identify the problems from an agricultural point of view.

NB has canoed down the Cut – some areas are bad, e.g. near Tuppy Arch, some areas are difficult to get at.

Landowners can't act themselves to slub out. It was suggested that the EA might be trying to lose its responsibility for internal rivers. Would DEFRA encourage IDBs to take over? If this happened local ratepayers are likely to be asked to foot the bill. The concern is about what would happen if there were major problems e.g. damage on the Sluice pipe, where repairs would cost more than the local rate could cover.

The Sea Defence Strategy is looking at the Long term function of the Sluice.

JRP suggested that MLSG needs to decide what to do. Should we wait for the outcomes of plans etc or, because of the critical impact for us, should we act independently and contact the EA direct? After some discussion it was agreed that we should. RSPB would probably support such a move but would be likely to make its own approach, rather than joining in with MLSG. MLSG's main drivers are community concerns, the RSPB's are the environment and conservation. Separate approaches, including one from local landowners, would probably be more effective.

It was agreed that MLSG should prepare an approach to the EA over the summer, and also respond to the new planning documents. It was thought that the consultation time was very short.

The next IDB meeting will be in the winter – area board meets every six months. IH will call a meeting with the Minsmere stakeholders (like the Deben IDB sub committee) in September/October.

SB reported that the marshes have dried out enormously but the area gets very damaged by the animals in the wet, with broken gates etc. NB said that 160 ml (6 inches) of rain had fallen between 21st May and the first week in June.

6. Public Meeting July 18 at Jubilee Hall, Theberton
AR can't attend but might be able to get colleague to attend

Publicity should indicate that the main focus is to inform and discuss inland water issues

What is the aim of the meeting, what do we want to achieve?

- i) We are honouring the commitment made to those who attended last meeting that we would keep them informed of any developments and that we would "get a seat at the table", which we have done, in terms of consultations, involvement with the IDB etc.
- ii) We should try to get a balance between providing information and getting people involved in planning future activities.
- iii) We should provide information such as what is an IDB, its relationship with other bodies, funding etc
- iv) We should give an update on meetings attended, consultation exercises etc

- v) Some information can be via presentations, some can be given in handouts

It was agreed to hold a brief planning meeting next week at JK's, 5pm 27th June.

- 7. Finance and Administration matter
JRP reported that we currently have £115 in annual subscriptions and donations. A bank account has been opened at the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society (Leiston branch) with JRP and JK as joint signatories. The account attracts no bank charges.

DR's suggestion that we have some MLSG calling cards made was agreed- JRP will get some costings and JS will help with the design.

JL suggested that we should try to widen our range and make more effort to get members in Middleton and Westleton. There was no formal response from their parish clerks to JRP's letter. JK will make enquiries with his contacts. JL and PE offered to leaflet

- 8. Any other business
As RSPB has observer status AR will be sent MLSG minutes and agendas in future.
- 9. Date of Next Meeting
To be agreed on 27 June