

## **MINSMERE LEVELS STAKEHOLDERS GROUP**

Notes of a meeting held at 1 Old Store Gardens, Eastbridge  
26 January 2008

Attended by:

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

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 December 2007 were agreed.
2. Matters arising  
All issues were dealt with under agenda items.
3. The Environment Agency's policies for the local area  
The recent mud on the road at Rattla Corner was caused by run off from the nearby field, probably after the late crop was harvested. It is good practice for the farmer to drill in a direction to minimise risk of water flowing off. It is the responsibility of the highways authority (Suffolk County Council) to clear the road if the mud is result of rain. This hasn't been done.

JS (in his role as parish councillor) wrote to the Highways Department at Saxmundham about the water in the ditches in Eastbridge. It is the responsibility of owners to keep any gulleys and channels clear (the previous owners of Sweet Briar Cottage grew willows in the channel at the side of their property. DR said that if the proposed building of three houses on the Cobblers site goes ahead he will ask that the road round the 'triangle' (junction of Cemetery and Chapel Roads) to be re-aligned to stop water running straight down Chapel Road. Apparently, run off used to flow straight down Cemetery Road past Red House Farm. The machine that digs out the channels stops short of ditches. (A highways authority is only legally responsible for a distance of one metre off the road.)

TT reported that she had written to the Environment Agency five years ago when it became clear that the way flood water was draining away was changing. The New Cut is cleared once a year but the ditches, which are the responsibility of the Internal Drainage Board for three years. The Parish Council has written to the IDB but they are saying it's not their responsibility any more(?) This is probably the result of the cuts to DEFRA and Environment Agency (£300M this year). Every landowner who owns marshes has to pay a drainage rate but this is not reflected in the work done on the land – it is now usually spent on clearing ditches and drains in towns. Minsmere is Internal Drainage District No 30, administered by the EA at Cobham Road, IP3 9JE. Every year a notice goes up on the bridge inviting inspection of the accounts –

it was suggested that members of this group should do that this year. DR reported that all IDBs are currently subject to review. DEFRA/EA has set an April deadline for them to identify what they own and then develop asset management plan.

The question was raised of what had happened to the idea of installing a diesel pump to override the Sluice – this was turned down by the EA on cost grounds (the general feeling was that the estimate of £2-3M is ridiculous). Why couldn't the RSPB and Sizewell subsidise it? Why don't they just cover the grid with a piece of metal, so long as there is an air pipe?

4. John Rea Price's meeting with the RSPB

After reminding the meeting of the background to his contact with the RSPB (the erection of the fences causing danger to the deer and concern about Scotts Hall Cottages lying empty) JRP described his meeting earlier this month with Adam Rowlands, Senior Site Manager for the Minsmere Reserve. It was clear that there were many issues, such as the future of the cottages that were determined centrally at the RSPB HQ and that were therefore outside Adam's control.

AR made it clear to JRP that the reserve had been very unhappy at the volume of fresh water coming down the New Cut onto its sections of the levels and that it had had active discussions with the Environment Agency to ensure that the sluice pipe was eventually cleared of shingle. In that sense the concerns and objective of the RSPB and the MLSG appeared to coincide. However, the RSPB wouldn't sign up to a campaign like that proposed by SCAR – rather they have a "let nature take its course" philosophy and are re-positioning themselves (see newsletter delivered this week). JS made the point about the popularity of Minsmere and the views of members who like to visit it about the likely effect of flooding on the reserve. Although the RSPB has been given planning permission for a new education block they were turned down for a Lottery grant to fund it because they didn't have a public engagement strategy. They have now hired consultants to talk to the public etc. AR's predecessor held three public meetings about the RSPB's 5 year plan but very few people turned up. They would be much more likely to get public interest if they held a meeting about the impact of climate change, coastal erosion etc on the reserve.

The RSPB would be unlikely to affiliate to this group if we are linked to SCAR etc. JS suggested that if SCAR does move to become a national group, then it would make good sense for the RSPB nationally to be involved.

It was agreed that this group should meet AR and that it would be better in a small meeting like this, rather than a public meeting. We can start by discussing how we can support each other, where do our interests converge (for example on the inland flooding threat) etc.

5. Report on the SCAR meeting

The minutes of this meeting, attended by JS, JL, JRP and JC, have already been circulated. JS reported that it was a good meeting, held in the SCDC Council Chamber at Melton. John Gummer MP was in the chair and added comments that were clear and straightforward. Future plans include the

possibility of joining with others to become a national group. Locally, there are plans for a public meeting at Snape Maltings, with key speakers such as representatives from the insurance industry.

This meeting agreed that, in principle, we should affiliate to SCAR. This led to a discussion of the subscription (£50) and how we should raise this, and money for our own needs. Ask the Parish Council for a donation? Hold a fundraising event, e.g. a JK firework party? It was agreed that we could not ask for donations until after a public meeting.

6. Communication with local parish councils

JRP reported that he has written to the clerks of the parish councils of Middleton, Westleton and Theberton and Eastbridge.

7. Next steps

It was agreed that February is too soon for the proposed public meeting. It would be better when the nights are lighter, for example in early once the clocks have gone forward.

JK agreed to establish dates when Jubilee Hall would be free. We may need to pay a small fee. As well as short speeches and a Q&A session we could produce a display of photographs and news cuttings of the marshes and flooding in the area.

It was agreed that we would try to get a short item in the March village newsletter, followed very quickly afterwards by a separate information sheet that we would produce and deliver ourselves. JRP would also write something for the Yoxmere Fisherman.

JRP suggested that we invite the chair of the Alde and Ore group, David Aldren, to the public meeting or to one of these meetings. DR suggested that we also invite Joan Girling to a meeting – although she is no longer our SCC councillor she would be interested in the issues and has a lot of contacts.

8. AOB

The meeting agreed to adopt JK's suggested slogan "Our Coast, Our Livelihoods, our Homes" which we could incorporate into the proposed letterhead.

9. Date of the next meeting

Adam Rowlands will be invited to the next meeting. The preferred date is Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> February. If AR can only come on a Sunday we will offer Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> February starting at 3pm. If he is unavailable the next preferred dates would be the following weekend, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> March.

The meeting ended at 6 20pm

jmc 27 January 2008