

MINSMERE LEVELS STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

Planning Group Meeting

Notes of a meeting held at RSPB Minsmere 27 February 2010

Attended by:

John Keeble (Convenor)
Adam Rowlands (RSPB)
Ian Hart (IDB)
Jon Swallow
Stephen Brett
David Robb
John Rea Price
Martin Clarke
Judith Croton (note taker)

Apologies: Nat Bacon

Agenda

1. John Rea Price opened the meeting by saying it served 2 purposes. It gives Ian Hart the opportunity to report to his 'ratepayers' of the Internal Drainage Board and also MLSG can have a planning meeting.

2. Matters Arising

Pauline English and Janet Lister have both stood down from the Planning Group. They are still committed to MLSG and will help at public meetings etc. The meeting recorded its thanks to them.

3. Minutes of last meeting

- i) Soft sea defences. JRP reported that he had observed shingle building up around the defences at Dunwich. More of a similar type, he understood were planned for Thorpeness. In answer to a question Adam Rowlands said that there had been overtopping at Dingle Marshes but no breach of the sea wall. The Environment Agency has been raising the banks around the reed beds, but had to stop because of the bad weather.
- ii) The response to the Managing Flood Risk Review was noted.
- iii) Would there be another annual meeting of the Association of Drainage Authorities? IH wasn't sure; he thought it would probably be Norfolk's turn this year.

The Minutes were agreed as a true record.

4. Meeting with the Environment Agency

Attended by AR, IH, JK, JRP, JS, DR, with a good representation from parish councils, especially Leiston Town Council.

It was felt that the meeting demonstrated the willingness of the EA to be much more open. The key thing to emerge was that they had appointed consultants to examine the Sluice – they should be reporting about now. AR reported that the consultants' sub-contractors were still looking at the Sluice. The main work was due to start this week, and last for 3 – 4 weeks but it has been delayed as there is too much water. There were divers in all last week. They need to

pump the chambers dry to complete the investigation; they need to pump right over the beach so water levels need to be lower. The EA wants to make the structure accessible to its own staff, then they can draw up a plan of work. John Keeble reported the one of the divers reported how surprised they were at how little silt there was in the pipes.

IH gave a slightly different view of the work. He thought it made sense doing a survey but only if it was carried out in June or July. This looked like 'mad March' spending. The capital budget is under spent and they probably have a 'use it or lose it' attitude. The EA now has very little in-house design capacity; they have to use consultants to report on 'value for money' in projects.

There is also a scheme to remove the asbestos that was put into the banks of the New Cut, up to the Reckford Bridge. Should the EA raise the banks to cover the asbestos? Steve Brett questioned whether they would also fill all the holes in the banks? IH was concerned about the implications of this. It is white asbestos not blue, it is saturated and well buried, if they remove it the effect could be disastrous. He thought the point should be raised at the SCAR meeting. AR said the RSPB will recommend capping the bank as they agree it would create more of a problem digging it out. The concern was that people are loathe to do work on a bank where there is asbestos and there could be a risk averse EA person saying that all asbestos must be removed. For example, the pipe that has been lying on the side of the New Cut, intended to take the outfall from Eastbridge meadow, has been there for 10 years as contractors won't work on the bank.

The EA has indicated its willingness to attend further meetings. It was agreed that JRP would send a reminder to them that we look forward to hearing the outcome of the review.

5. Ian Hart gave his report on the work of the Internal Drainage Board. The work on No. 7 Drain went remarkably well. He had set a budget of £7000 if he had known how the work would go he would have include the whole drain (Sandy Pytle to Leiston Main Drain) in the plan. The work cost £6000 not £7000. He has left instructions to his successor to finish this last bit. Will another environmental assessment be needed? AR thinks yes, it is on RSPB land and it will impact on water voles etc.

No13 Drain may get attention next year. This is the drain upstream of Eastbridge. Nat Bacon has done his fields. Does some of No. 13 belong to him and some to JK? If it was cleared water from Flash Corner could then run straight down, taking pressure off the road. If 'pioneer clearance' (removal of trees and shrubs) is required the IDB can request landowner to do this, which could be more expensive than the actual work itself. The meeting thought the land was clear.

IH announced that his successor will be David Thomas. He is currently surveyor to the Waveney Valley and Lothingland IDB, but will be expanding to East Suffolk – contact details to follow. He was an agronomist with MAFF and has some engineering expertise.

Were there any 'rate payer' issues to take up with IH? SB said that if the drains were being cleared out he has no issues. The contractor had done a good job – he is used by Suffolk Wildlife Trust and has a good reputation.

AR is a representative on the Area IDB which meets every 6 months. IH said the main board had forcefully reminded local authorities that they have the right to appoint representatives to the board. He agreed to JRP's suggestion that they are usually more absent than present and that it would be very helpful to write to Suffolk Coastal District Council asking them how they are represented on the IDB? If councillors are too busy they could nominate MLSC to attend on their behalf? IH said they have the power to appoint anyone they think fit so long as 'appropriately qualified'. The area board doesn't look at things in such close detail as the local IDB but then get to look at policy etc. It was agreed that JRP would do this.

It was agreed to record our recognition of the high quality of the work NB has done on his marshes.

IH advised the meeting that the IDB financial contribution to the work of MLSC had now been set up on a Standing Order.

The meeting recorded its great appreciation to Ian for all the support to, and interest in, Minsmere Levels Stakeholders' Group. We wished him a very happy new life after his retirement on 31 March.

6. Sizewell C&D
7. Meeting with EDF representatives. These 2 items were run together.

JRP and Jon Swallow attended the meeting organised by the Department of Energy and Climate Change at the Sizewell Club in early December 2009. This constituted the local component of the national consultation on the Government's draft nuclear policy statement. JRP described the meeting as 'chaotic' whereas JS thought it was tightly controlled by DECC. JRP thought they had conflated 2 issues - views on nuclear power and issues of the impact locally of building the new power stations

JS, who is a representative on the group made up of 24 parishes who are trying to achieve social contract with EDF, the Government and other bodies - seeking financial assistance to deal with anticipated pressures on transport, health, housing etc, gave an update on progress.

There was a meeting last week at SCDC. There was a presentation by EDF, but again not enough time for questions. The representative from the National Grid said existing electricity cables would have to be replaced and some new pylons constructed. Questions were asked about whether the cables could be put underground or under the sea?

EDF reported that in 3 years they hope to be on site, with 5000 workers living on a campus. It was suggested that accommodation should be more spread out in local villages, which could be left for local villagers to live in.

The proposed new access road, which would cut across Sizewell Belts, would be used 24/7 by heavy lorries, with noise and light pollution etc. EDF acknowledged this but said they need the road for safety reasons. People questioned why can't existing road be used - the 2 stations had used the existing road quite successfully and now 'A' was closed?

A new substation would also be required.

JK commented that they went through all of this with 'B' - extra roads were planned, which weren't necessary in the end.

AR reported that the RSPB has commented on national strategy document. There is nothing definite yet to comment on, but they have put down a marker. The organisation that has been contracted to do 2 years of survey on flora and fauna – has consulted with them.

JRP had also responded to DECC, on behalf of MLSG, in a similar vein to RSPB. MLSG would wish to discuss issues in much more detail with EDF and the Infrastructure Planning Committee (which may be abolished if there is a change of Government in May).. However he had pointed to our concerns about the proposed new road, and said that MLSG would need evidence that the present access past the A & B site would not be adequate

All local residents had received a flyer from EDF. It was agreed that we are only going to get anywhere we, as a community organisations get involved at the earliest stage and make clear that we wished to be fully consulted and involved. For this reason we have arranged to meet with representatives of EDF next Friday, 9am at 1 Old Store Gardens.

EDF will send 3 people. Colin Taylor did Shoreline monitoring for British energy. Angela Pearce is Director of External Affairs., and a third person we thought to be a representative of their public relations agency It was agreed that MLSG's objective should be put up markers about our concerns regarding the habitat, environmental and wildlife issues with the aim to opening up a continuing dialogue.

It was agreed that JK,DR, JS, JRP will attend and possibly a representative from the RSPB. DR will make a presentation describing the levels, and the issues confronting them.

A question was raised about the disposal of material from the foundations of 'C' and a trial to see if they can spread it on farm land. Does this include Upper Abbey Farm? Are they really going to put spoil on good arable land?

8. SCAR meeting

6 March 2010 at Stratford St Andrew

DR, MC, and possibly SB will attend. DR will present the MLSG annual report

JRP raised the e-mail from David Andren of the Alde and Ore Association. note for prospective MPs – will be asked to sign up to it

A number of small additions and amendments were agreed which will be forwarded to DA

9. MLSG programme 2010

We don't need to meet too often as we are in constant contact but we should have a public met meeting late spring, early summer.

We should focus on inland water issues with all the work that has been going on. AR would talk about the strategy for water management within the reserve. We would like IH to attend but he hopes to have a 3 month sabbatical – if he can't come someone else should represent the IDB.

The Minsmere River is most critical so we should have an EA rep, possibly Giles Bloomfield. IH said they are back peddling on 'low consequence rivers' such as the Minsmere and Deben. We should ask the Area Flood Risk Manager in the first instance (ask Mark Johnson to identify the best person to come).

The preferred date for the meeting is Friday, 14 May. If that isn't possible, we should go for a date in July.

10. Housekeeping

JRP reported that with the IDB funding and a donation from NB we have nearly £600 in the bank and currently not spending a great deal. It was agreed to pay £25 to JRP for admin expenses (photocopying etc). It was agreed that we would have a moratorium on subscriptions but continue with the annual membership.

11. Date of the next meeting

It was agreed to arrange the next meeting when the date for the public meeting is confirmed.