

MINSMERE LEVELS STAKEHOLDERS' GROUP

Notes of a meeting held at 1 Old Store Gardens, Eastbridge
29 December 2007

Attended by:

John Keeble
Jon Swallow
Janet Lister
Stephen Brett
David Robb
John Rea Price
Judith Croton (note taker)

1. The meeting began with a discussion of why the proposed group should be set up.
 - i) Concerns about coastal erosion and flooding of the marshes
 - ii) A desire to improve communications with the RSPB and other local organisations who would be affected by coastal erosion and flooding of the marshes
 - iii) A need for contact and links with similar groups along the Suffolk Coast (see 6 below).

2. It was pointed out that currently the threat of flooding came mainly from inland, not from penetration by the sea. Why is the water taking longer to drain off the marshes these days? The Sluice has been blocked by shingle twice in 2007. It was thought that changes to the cover of the sluice (a metal grille) made it more likely to block up.

In former times each river had its own Inland Drainage Board (IDB) but now many of the Suffolk IDBs have been amalgamated and their funding reduced. As a result drainage ditches were not being dug out as often as they used to be. The Environment Agency has overall responsibility for the clearing of the Sluice and digging out the ditches.

3. The meeting discussed what area any Stakeholders' Group should cover. David Robb circulated a copy of a map of the Minsmere floodplain produced by the Environment Agency in 2004. From this it was clear that the villages of Middleton and Westleton are also at risk in the event of flooding and would have a direct interest in the future management of Minsmere Levels. After some debate it was agreed that any stakeholders' group should be open to anyone, whether resident, worker or visitor, who has an "interest in the long term preservation of the Minsmere Levels and coastline".
4. The meeting began to draw up a list of groups who should be invited to become involved in any Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group:-

RSPB
British Energy

Well Stakeholders' Group
Suffolk Wildlife Trust
Natural England
Forestry Commission

It was agreed that we would try to complete this list in the next few weeks and invite organisations to send a representative to future meetings.

The group should also have formal contact with the parish councils of Middleton, Westleton and Theberton and Eastbridge. Stephen Brett and Jon Swallow are members of Theberton Parish Council.

5. This group should consider itself an initial planning group that can do some background work, make contacts, draw up a list of issues etc. then organise a meeting that all interested people could attend. At that stage a committee, terms of reference etc can be agreed. Membership of the IPG should start with the people at this meeting. John Keeble agreed to act as Convenor, and John Rea Price as Secretary.
6. Information about a group called Suffolk Coast Against Retreat (SCAR) was circulated. This is an umbrella group, set up two years ago by Suffolk Coastal MP, John Gummer. It has members made up of groups all along the coast who are affected by the threat of coastal erosion and flooding. The Minsmere Levels would appear to be the only area that is not yet involved. SCAR will have its first formal meeting on Friday 11 January 2008 at the Council Offices in Melton. It was agreed that John and Judith Rea Price would attend, and possibly Janet Lister.
7. It was decided to organise a meeting at the Jubilee Hall in February 2008. People and representatives from groups identified in section 4. above should be invited. This group will meet again in January 2008 to plan the meeting and to hear feedback from the SCAR meeting.
8. The meeting agreed that good communication was vital in order to involve as many interested people as possible and to avoid being seen as a self appointed clique. Initially this could be via the Theberton and Eastbridge newsletter, the new village web-site and The Yoxmere Fisherman. John Rea Price would also write to the clerks of the three parish councils. Later, we could consider wider publicity.