

## **MINSMERE LEVELS STAKEHOLDERS GROUP**

Notes of the public meeting held at the Jubilee Hall,  
Theberton 3 October 2008

John Keeble opens the meeting.

David Robb provides brief update  
Publication of the Shoreline Management Plan (long term  
strategic plan for the whole Suffolk coast) now postponed  
until January 2009.

Meeting with Giles Bloomfield from the Environment  
Agency.

Introduces Ian Hart.

Civil engineer involved in water matters since 1970  
Since early retirement was the clerk to 3 other drainage  
boards in Suffolk - Alde, Deben and Gipping - which are  
now joined in the 1 Inland Drainage Board\*. Amalgamation  
driven by DEFRA (? Making them easier to liaise with).  
Have gone from 250 to 80 boards.

Likens small IDB to a parish council - can address local  
needs but they cannot necessarily be up to speed with  
wider issues.

\*East Suffolk IDB set up in April 2008

Drains previously the responsibility of Anglian Water  
Authority → National Rivers Authority - Environment  
Agency.

The EA was looking for someone else to administer local  
drainage work - not there thing, wanting to be more  
national and strategic and so were happy for DEFRA to  
suggest amalgamation of IDBs.

Previously IH was a 'one man band' , couldn't act in an  
emergency.

Now regional IDBs linked together in a "Water Level  
Management Alliance" - IH likens to town council. Staff  
of 15, collects the local rate, organises drainage. IH  
has been retained as a consultant.

What is the relationship WLMA : MLSG? Previously IH had  
to cast around to find people to represent the IDBs.  
The East Suffolk IDB is made up of 11 people, covers an  
area from Stowmarket to Southwold. This year the members  
have been government appointments, next year they will be  
elected. Adam Rowlands is the Minsmere representative -  
AR suggested the link to MLSG.  
IH had little prior knowledge of local drainage so MLSG  
will be very useful to him.

*1 there*

How will maintenance be carried out in future?

There is a perception locally that the drains are not as well maintained as they were 20 years ago.

East Suffolk IDB has inherited the finances and budget previously managed by the EA. £3000 for this year BUT this is largely being spent on setting up the new IDB. Next year they will begin to tackle the most pressing issues and develop a plan.

Describes DR's map and walking around the system with local landowners (see earlier MLSSG notes)

Sandy Pytle Plantation check spelling has not been maintained for some time. There is no point in doing anything else until this bottleneck is cleared. They will do this in 2009 and then begin to move upstream. There are no resources locally so the work will be carried out by contractors, via tender (most cost efficient way to do this).

Landowners and District Council will pay for this via levied rate.

Anyone on 2 metre contour line (roughly the limit of the 1953 flood) is liable to pay drainage rates.

East Suffolk now sooner formed than further changes are in the pipeline

Climate change

Spin off from EA's flood management plan

DEFRA looking for more amalgamations?

Floods and Water Bill to be put before parliament soon. Floods of last few years. Enquiry by Sir Michael Pitt "The Pitt Report" - one organisation should take responsibility for flood risk management, but not necessarily the EA. ? local authorities?

IDBs are concerned about this - lobbying drafters of the Bill that IDBs should be given the opportunity to take over responsibility for local rivers, but would need to be able to call on additional money, possibly from LAs.

For the next 3/4 years there will be no challenge to the need of the IDB to get on with local drainage work, but after that?

Providing drainage service to low level areas will be increasingly challenging with climate change.

Shoreline Management Plan

EA view is that previous levels of river management are unsustainable

Are looking at a 1 : 10 years risk of flooding, than the IDB preferred 1 : 50 years risk

Will use the same standard as for the Blyth?

A higher standard of maintenance would be down to locals?  
Could local communities / IDB adopt the rivers? The EA draws its funds from the whole of Suffolk, how could a localised area like this raise the funds?

IH reiterates his relief that MLSG exists for the IDB to call on for advice and information. There will be interesting challenges ahead.

Q & A session

Explains links between EA and IDB responsibilities

New Cut created in the 1800s

1920s Water Resources Act

East Suffolk Ca.....Board get jrp to check notes

Principle drainage of the area

Adopted responsibility for the New Cut → later Leiston

Main Drain

"Main River Drains"

The EAs powers are permissive - they can do what they see fit and what they think is worthwhile

EA and predecessor organisations are responsible for the New Cut, the Old River (blue on DR's map)

Low lying land was taken over by the IDBs - Minsmere in the 1920s?

Drain No. 7 - Eastbridge → Flash Corner has "chronic, low level drainage problems"

An IDB can adopt or reject any drain in its area, but again its powers are permissive. It is expected, but not required, to do work

It can raise a rate for works its believes should be done - it is a democratic body because of the levy on local landowners. Since 1986 the local authority has been levied for the rate on householders for whom a direct rate would be uneconomical to collect (i.e. most houses in Eastbridge) so can nominate representatives to the IDB. The IDB can adopt new water courses if they are causing problems, e.g. flooding, and work was deemed necessary. Some income has to go to the EA to pay for the work they do.

IDB money is ringfenced - Minsmere rate has to be spent on Minsmere.

In East Anglia agricultural landowners are obliged to pay an additional levy to the EA.

EA has a regional flood defence committee drawn from County Councillors so there is some indirect democratic accountability.

The Sluice

The New Cut was designed to take most of the standing water off the marshes. The Sluice is the focal

collecting point - it has 3 flap valves which rely on gravity. They can only discharge on the ebb tide, if the tide stays up nothing can escape from the system.

Benacre Pumping station - Until the 1930s the Lothingland Hundred river drained via a sluice similar to the one on Minsmere. It proved ineffective so a pump was installed. But pumps use diesel/electricity and cost a lot to run.

With sea level rise (?1 or 2 metres?) the tidal ebb will be so limited that a pump will be required on Minsmere but this won't be an issue for 20+ years.

Suggestion that we should tap into 'sweeteners' that come from the building of Sizewell C and D. We should tap into the need to defend the coast at that point. Will the EA be clever enough to suggest that a new sluice should be built as part of the power station development?

It is inconceivable that coastal erosion would be allowed at Sizewell? When B was built it was declared that the height of the Sizewell Belts made the area safe but the erosive effect of the sea was neglected. Is it inconceivable that Minsmere would be allowed to go? Road access to the power station is at a low level, as is the Leiston Sewage Works.

The underlying process is progressive but if the Sluice fails there won't be a gradual erosion (popular perception) but an inundation to the 2 metre contour line.

Why doesn't the IDB negotiate to take over the New Cut - this would be a bad idea, the EA would probably be only too happy to walk away.

How would the EA square the possibility of walking away with its responsibility for conservation?

Under European law it is obliged to maintain the marshes in a good condition, together with the maintenance of its key features. If this is lost it would have to compensate with new land.

IH described a recent Blyth Estuary Stakeholders meeting. It was suggested that if the EA walked away from river maintenance the water treatment works near St Felix School would be under threat. The EA responded by challenging the Essex and Suffolk Water company To say how much it was prepared to put in to defend it.

The work at Sandy Pytle will come to nothing if the EA doesn't maintain the New Cut.

There was a question about the nature and cost of the machinery now used to clear and maintain the drains and rivers.

Traditionally workmen would dig out the weeds and silt, sometimes using a chain with cutting blades attached (2 men still maintain some of the Gipping water courses in this way but the gradient there is steeper so the water is less prone to silting). The Minsmere gradient is flat so the river does not develop enough energy to clear the silt. It wouldn't be possible to get workmen to perform the kind of manual labour required these days.

Is it necessary to use tracks and mats for the digging equipment (significantly increasing the cost)? JRP recalled Giles Bloomfield's description of the work and required cost to excavate soggy areas of Minsmere. In former times it was possible to get some of this work done with tracks and mats when the ground was frozen but it is rarely cold enough now.

IDB appointing contractors by tender may turn out to be cheaper than the EA using its own workforce.

SC's question about the regular flooding of septic tanks, high water table etc.

JRP sums up. We need to use lateral thinking about how we raise money to clear the backlog of work, e.g. 'tapping' EDF.