

Communities unite against Blyth Estuary proposals

Suffolk County Council, Waveney District Council and Suffolk Coastal District Council have joined up to challenge the latest Environment Agency proposals for the Blyth Estuary.

In its recently published Blyth Estuary strategy, the Environment Agency has said it will no longer fund local flood defences, leaving local communities to fend for themselves in the future.

Senior councillors and officers from the authorities have formed a group to help lead the community response to the proposals and are calling for local people and businesses to give their views as part of the Environment Agency's consultation exercise.

Suffolk County Councillor Guy McGregor, portfolio holder for roads and transport, who is also chairman of the group said; "The local authorities will challenge strongly the Environment Agency proposals for abandoning the flood defences. Vital links between Lowestoft and the rest of the country could be broken on a more frequent basis if flood defences are not maintained in the Blyth."

He added; "The Environment Agency must look properly at the full implications of their proposals to withdraw maintenance of sea defences which will have dire consequences, for example, flooding of the A12 and the A1095. The Agency cannot just expect local authorities to pick up the cost. We need to work together to find an acceptable long term strategy for managing the Blyth and other more loved Suffolk estuaries."

Cllr Ken Sale, portfolio holder for the built environment from Waveney District Council: "We are not prepared to simply stand by and let one of the most beautiful parts of Waveney and the Eastern region be left to the elements.. We have a duty to residents but also to the many thousands of people who visit every year and we will be working together to press the Environment Agency for a change of attitude."

Suffolk Coastal's Deputy Leader, Councillor Andy Smith said: "Years of under-investment and inadequate funding by the Government in coastal defences is now leaving the Environment Agency (EA) with no choice but to abandon this and doubtless many other estuaries. I am not convinced that the EA has really taken into account all the relevant facts regarding the Blyth

estuary, but what is certain is that the Government needs to urgently increase the amount of national funding on offer. It may be that there are record funds on offer but it is certainly true that the risks facing our estuaries and coast are far worse than ever before.

"Suffolk Coastal is happy to work in partnership with the County Council, Waveney, local town and parish councils, and indeed the EA, to lobby the Government to make sure that the funding is there to fund important schemes like those to protect the Blyth estuary. The local community should not and will not accept the destruction of their environment simply because funds are unavailable and nor will this Council.

"We question many of the fundamental assumptions made by the Government and followed by the EA who have little option other than to follow the official lead. In particular, while the previous Minister has said when talking about floods in inland towns that to have your home flooded is traumatic, the fact is that this strategy would sound the death knell for the Blyth estuary and 40 of its homes - it would be terminal for them.

"I would also call on our local communities to flood the EA with their responses to the draft strategy, pointing out the impact that this policy of planned flooding will have not just on local homes but also all aspects of local life, whether it be Walberswick or Southwold, the A12 and other roads, wildlife, jobs and tourism."

More information on the Environment Agencies strategy can be found at:

<http://www.suffolkestuaries.co.uk>

Should you have any queries related to the draft strategy, write to:

Blyth Estuary
Environment Agency (Anglian Region)
Kingfisher House
Goldhay Way
Orton Goldhay
Peterborough PE2 5ZR

Email: - blythestuary@environment-agency.gov.uk

Please also send a copy of your response to: Suffolk County Council, Countryside Services, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich.

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