



Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group

Newsletter No 9. November 2014.

The sluice works completed – and a year of waiting on detailed plans for Sizewell C

Welcome to our 2014 newsletter. Last year we reported at length on the progress of works on the sluice and New Cut and on initial proposals for Sizewell C. The sluice works are now completed, but detailed proposals for Sizewell C are still awaited meaning that this newsletter will be a good deal briefer. In 2013 as 'stop press' we reported that the Minsmere Levels and local coastline had escaped serious damage in the storm surge of 5 December 2014 and this becomes the logical subject which to start this edition.

The storm surge, 5 December 2013.

As in 1953, a very low pressure weather system arriving over northern Britain caused a storm surge to travel down the East coast. It caused severe damage to parts of the Norfolk coast, washing away cliffs and several houses in Hemsby and severe flooding in parts of Lowestoft. Suffolk as a whole and Minsmere in particular was very lucky on that night. Although the surge height of two metres was similar to that of the dreadful 1953 floods, this time we benefited greatly from the winds being a relatively light westerly in contrast with the strong north easterly of 1953. The sea broke over the coastal dunes just south of the Dunwich cliff, but did not breach the Minsmere dunes as it did in 1953, and unlike the dunes between Dunwich and Walberswick and the Harbour inn at Southwold. In addition, many coastal defences have greatly improved since 1953, as have forecasting and early warning systems. Public information and close monitoring of vulnerable points by the Environment Agency's (EA) resilience teams have also made a great difference. There were however some casualties of the surge (but no fatalities) and locally the flooding of some parts of Snape village to a depth of 5 feet at the western end of the Alde River. Further down the Alde, the river walls protecting Hazelwood Marshes were badly breached and the damage is now viewed as terminal. Between 1953 and 2013 there were 7 other significant storm surges on the Suffolk coast; the EA predict that with rising sea levels, the 1953 event, rated then at 1 in 200 years, will likely occur 1 in 2 to 10 years by 2100. Suffolk County Council are currently leading on a major flood defence program for the Lowestoft area, estimated at costing some £30m and requiring significant joint funding as this amount is beyond the EA's Grant in Aid scheme. It will be several years before the scheme is completed.

Completion of Works on the Minsmere New Cut and the Sluices.

We have been very fortunate with the funding that the Environment Agency has secured for works to safeguard the Levels. Work can only take place out of the RSPB bird breeding season which is from March

till October. The reinforcement of the North Wall and construction of two coastal bunds, completed in 2012, undoubtedly showed its worth during the storm surge and have contributed to the fact that its impact was relatively minor, with the temporary overtopping of the North Marsh. Figure 1 and 2 shows high water by the Dunwich cliffs at the next tide after the surge.



Figure 1 View from top of cliff



Figure 2 on the beach at high tide.

The major refurbishment of the main sluice was completed in February 2014, having been delayed by both bad weather and the need more extensive repair and rebuilding that had been revealed after the start of work on site. Work started in late 2012, but wet weather severely hindered work and it was continued in September 2013. The main work was on the sea sluice, replacing the old sluice gates which had distorted and rotted, and changing the gate supports to improve drainage flow. Figure 3 and 4 show the work on the sluice.



Figure 3 work on the Leiston Drain



Figure 4 work on the sluice towards the sea.

Figure 5 and 6 show the sluice working in March 2014. The new gates have vertical hinges, allowing much larger opening, and have a return mechanism which allows some water to flow upstream at low water.



Figure 5 Leiston drain sluice gates working



Figure 6 New Cut sluice gates

Work has also been carried out on a series of sluices along the course of the New Cut. At the dam bridge in Eastbridge, a new side sluice was put into the north bank of the New Cut as shown in figure 7 and repairs were also made to the sluice discharging from the RSPB Minsmere reserve into the New Cut, figure 8.



Figure 7 new sluice at Dam Bridge



Figure 8 repairing sluice from RSPB reserve

A significant part of the contract included the repair of banks of the New Cut between the Dam Bridge and Reckford Bridge, Middleton. These banks had been heavily degraded by the passage of deer, see Figure 9. In the 1950's the walls of the cut had been lined with vertical asbestos sheets to retain water in the New Cut, and in places broken asbestos was lying on top of the banks and along the footpath. It was decided to improve the top cover of the asbestos sheets where it was exposed and Figure 10 shows application of the new protection plastic channels.



Figure 9 deer damage to New Cut bank



Figure 10 repair of exposed asbestos

The proposed Sizewell C Nuclear Power Station

Our newsletter last year contained a lengthy account of the plans by EDF for the development of the new Sizewell C power station which were published as part of the Stage One consultation which concluded in February 2013. Rather to our frustration, almost two years later we know little more than what was outlined at that time. This is likely to remain the case until much needed further information is provided as part of the Stage Two consultation. This had been expected by the end of 2014, but it now appears to have been deferred, possibly until mid2015, and could slip even further if funding issues relating to the sister development at Hinkley Point are not resolved.

We remain greatly concerned about the potential impact on both our coast line and its defences and also on the flow of inland water in the discharge of which the Levels play such an important role. We have been greatly heartened that our colleagues in SCAR (Suffolk Coast against Retreat) have recognised that the development is likely to have an impact on the coastal process well beyond the Minsmere frontage. SCAR sought a meeting with the technical specialists of EDF, which took place at its Leiston offices on 8 May 2014.

The meeting was useful in so far as it provided information about the extensive studies of coastal process that were underway both off-shore and on land (including a radar survey being undertaken from the top of the now closed Sizewell A station) but we heard little about what was being learnt from these, beyond the fact that coastal movement around Sizewell beach itself was very slow, whilst that to the North (including Minsmere) was more volatile, - it could be slow, but it could be more rapid. The impact of the development - and its jetties- was therefore very hard to predict. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) will have a key role to play in later stages of the planning approval process as it must licence any structure erected beyond the low water point. We were encouraged that the MMO's response to the Stage One consultation, which we belatedly received, did identify several concerns. This led onto discussion about the proposals for the landing structures, followed on about which details had been extremely scant in the Stage One consultation documents. We were quite surprised to learn that two landing structures are now proposed, one being a permanent 'beach landing facility' for use when material and equipment are brought in for periodic maintenance and upgrading programmes, and a much bigger temporary jetty. This will receive material that will be too bulky for delivery by road or rail. We were given no information as to its length or breadth, but were assured that it would be constructed on piers so as to minimise any impact of tidal flows. However, we felt that there remained several questions to be answered on the long term impact of both structures.

Although the consequences for inland water flows were only briefly touched on at this meeting, we remain very concerned about the size of the land take that the development will require, particularly during the construction phase. We continue to seek re-assurance about the impact of the large areas of hard standing that will be required, and of the proposed campus for 3000 workers on land that drains into the Levels.

Although this is strictly outside the brief of MLSG, it is important to record that there is great alarm about the social consequences for surrounding communities of the vastly increased traffic flow on narrow roads which are already saturated at certain times of the day. There is also great concern about the proposed campus close to Eastbridge which will be quite out of proportion in relation to the very small nearby hamlets and villages.

And so on to 2015

The coming year promises to be dominated by Sizewell C concerns and the need to prepare a response to the doubtless voluminous documents which will accompany the Stage Two consultation. We just hope that we will be given longer than the six weeks that were allowed for at Stage One.

With that – a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year!