



Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group. Newsletter May 2008

1. Public Meeting:

The Public Meeting to launch the group held on 17th April in Theberton Jubilee Hall was attended by about 60 people, over 30 of whom signed up to be involved in the Minsmere Levels Stakeholder Group. It is clear that there is strong local support and this newsletter is to inform those who signed up about progress and future events. The main objectives are repeated below.

It was also made clear that the acoustics of the Jubilee Hall were inadequate for such a meeting and a public address system would be useful for future meetings.

2. Objectives for Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group :

1. Discussions with IDB to ensure routine maintenance of ditches and land drains. Involve major landowners in co-operative discussions.
2. Establishing links with conservation bodies to explore common interests on managements of water levels and protection of our coast
3. Negotiations with Environment Agency to ensure that the New Cut and Sluice are maintained in the medium term, and that action taken if e.g. blocked by shingle. Install water pump at sluice?
4. Encouragement of a long term strategy for managed re-alignment if necessary along the shingle bar from Minsmere Cliffs to Sizewell. Negotiate with national bodies, Environment Agency etc., re 'sensible action' on Shore-line Management Plan.

3. Major problems and relevant responsible authorities:

1. Fresh water drainage and flooding > **Internal Drainage Board.**
2. Maintenance of the New Cut and Sluice > **Environment Agency.**
3. Coastal erosion and long term policy > **Suffolk Council.**

4. Notifying public bodies about MLSG

Following the meeting we wrote to Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Theberton, Middleton, Westleton and Leiston councils, Suffolk Coast and Heath, the Environment Agency, Sizewell A, British Energy, RSPB, National Trust and Suffolk Wildlife to inform them about the establishment of the stakeholder group. A total of 23 contacts have been made to date.

5. New Suffolk Internal Drainage Board

The new board was set up on 1st April this year. It is an amalgamation of the Alderton, Hollesley and Bawdsey, The River Blyth, The River Deben, The Fromus, Alde and Thorpeness, The River Gipping, The Lower Alde, The Minsmere and the Upper Alde IDBs. The District Engineer in charge is Ian Hart (he lives in Norfolk and will be visiting Minsmere in June to view some of the problems). The new Board's initial membership was determined by appointment made by DEFRA, however democratic elections must be arranged amongst the rate-paying electorate within a year of formation. Adam Rowlands from RSPB and 10 other landowners from these catchments are the current representatives on the Board and their inaugural meeting was held at Woodbridge on 29 April. We gave Adam Rowlands some of the background information regarding the significant drains on the Minsmere Levels. Adam Rowlands commented after the meeting that the first need was to obtain work records from each of the old IDBs and then conduct a review of current needs to develop a plan for the future.

6. New Cut and Sluice.

Remember that the IDB does not have responsibility for the New Cut and Sluice; they are classified as a main river and as such are maintained by the Environment Agency directly.

At the public meeting we commented about the need to modify the surge chamber of the sluice on the beach and were told that the work had been completed that day. For those who have not been down to the sluice since, the structure now looks as shown below:



New air vents on sluice

We have written to thank the Environment Agency for the work; it is only 17 months since the chamber became filled with shingle following a surge tide in November 2006, an event repeated in November 2007. This work is an indication that they are still prepared to maintain the sluice.

7. Longer Term Strategy for Suffolk Coast.

As a result of our letters to various public bodies we have been invited to attend a 'Suffolk Estuary and Coast Conference 14 June 2008 at Southwold Pier on behalf of Suffolk County, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils :

' You will be aware of the Environment Agency's recent proposals for the future management of the Blyth Estuary. The approach to future flood risk management of the Estuary contained in the draft Strategy has created a great deal of national, regional and local concern. The issues of particular concern include the threat of inundation of land, the impact on the local economy from the loss of jobs in tourism businesses, the significant change of the landscape and that proposals for similar policies may be made for the management of the Alde/Ore and Deben Estuaries.

Senior Councillors of Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils joined together to form the Blyth Estuary Strategy Group to oppose the Environment Agency's proposals for the Blyth Estuary. The Environment Agency is currently considering the joint response from the local authorities, and is due to publish further flood and erosion risk management strategies for the Alde/Ore and Deben Estuaries in autumn 2008.

In advance of the publication of any other proposals by the Environment Agency, the Local Authorities believe it would be useful for all organisations with an interest in the management of the Suffolk estuaries and coast to discuss the experience gained from responding to the draft Blyth Estuary Strategy '

We plan to attend and will circulate any useful information obtained, and also ensure that Minsmere is included in the general discussions.

8 . Stakeholder Group Meeting :

7.30 pm 18th July in Theberton Jubilee Hall.

We will hold a Stakeholder Group meeting to encourage more discussion, to identify current issues and concerns, and to inform you of developments at the Internal Drainage Board level and at the longer term coastal planning level.

9. The way forward.

You will see from the above, that the formation of the stakeholder group has happened at a time when several changes are taking place and concerns for the future environment are increasing, though the costs of the inland flooding in parts of England last year are affecting the funding from DEFRA to the Environment Agency. Given the level of interest shown at the public meeting we need to set up a **fighting fund** to cover expenses and enable the MLSG to take an active part in pursuing the objectives. We propose an annual subscription of **£5** and have set up a bank account to accept and control finances. Any donations of more than £5 will of course be most gratefully received.

If you would like to contribute please complete the attached form and return to :

Contact. : John Rea Price

1 Old Stores Gardens, Eastbridge, Leiston, Suffolk. IP16 4SJ.
Telephone: 01728 635 083 Email: John.Reaprice@btinternet.com