



Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group.

Newsletter No 2. September 2008

1. Meetings:

Following the successful launch of the Group in April, a second Public Meeting of the Stakeholder Group, held on 18th July in Theberton Jubilee Hall was attended by about 40 people. We now have 25 signed and paid up members and a dedicated bank account. We are grateful for their support, and we would be very happy if others receiving this newsletter would also like to sign up.

The meeting focussed on our progress so far and encouraged comments and suggestions. This newsletter is a further step in informing group members of progress.

The next **Stakeholder Group Public Meeting** is scheduled for :

**FRIDAY 3rd October at 7.30 pm
in Theberton Jubilee Hall.**

This meeting will focus on the internal drainage system of the marshes. Mr Ian Hart, who has been appointed as the new Internal Drainage board engineer, will explain economic river management and some of the problems and practical solutions relating to draining marsh land and maintaining the ditches, drains and banks. His many years of practical experience both in dealing with the Environment Agency and with removing water should start a very interesting discussion.

2. Meeting with new Internal Drainage Board engineer: Ian Hart.

As mentioned at the inaugural meeting, a new East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board was established from 1st April 2008, in place of the 6 smaller IDBs. Ian Hart has been appointed as engineer, and Adam Rowlands from RSPB was nominated by DEFRA as the initial local landowner representative onto the new IDB management board. Ian Hart made a familiarisation visit to Minsmere on 13th June. The MLSG managed to get all the local landowners to the meeting, which involved walking over much of the area to highlight problems. This meeting was 3 weeks after the period of very heavy rain (160 mm in 3 weeks in May) so the marshes were still recovering from the localised flooding. This helped to show the problems, and Ian Hart made several comments about the quality of maintenance work done. He proposed to set up a Minsmere sub-committee of interested people

to discuss IDB work on the Minsmere levels. This work is funded by a precept on major landowners, currently about £3000 per year. Ian Hart is currently preparing a work schedule and will be talking to landowners and the MLSG in October to provide more information on possible IDB work. The split responsibility between the EA and IDB over the drains and New Cut/sluice can lead to problems.

3. Response to Environment Agency's East Suffolk Catchment Flood Management Plan June 2008.

A consultation document sent out by the Environment Agency, asking for comments by the 18th July. This document was circulated to the Parish councils for comment. The general thrust of the consultation was to cut back on Environment Agency funding for flood management in this region, to help pay for the massive flood defence works required in other parts of the country following last summer's flooding. We sent in a response, partly based on the comments made at the coastal strategy meeting (see item 5 below) that the method of accounting used to evaluate possible losses was totally inadequate and that other economic factors such as tourism and the natural environment were not considered. For the full response see web link, item 7.

4. Meeting with Environment Agency Technical Specialist: Giles Bloomfield.

Following attempts to find records of past work conducted by the Minsmere IDB we made contact with Giles Bloomfield who was previously responsible for supervising Minsmere IDB work, and also is area manager for the Environment Agency. He met four of us on 1st August to explain the interaction of the IDB and Environment Agency, and also the method of prioritising work within the Environment Agency based on a risk assessment. Minsmere River is classified as a medium risk, and therefore work such as reed clearing is performed annually, and major desilting on about a 4 year cycle. However if emergency work is required, e.g. at Walberswick last autumn after the storm surge flooding, then other scheduled work may be omitted. The E.A. attempts to make a transparent priority allocation for work, but it lost £M 200 in 2006 due to DEFRA errors on farm subsidies. However an increase for flood alleviation work of £M 200 is promised for 2011.

Giles made several interesting points about work on the New Cut. The Environment Agency are no longer allowed to use a reed cutter on a boat, as the propeller-wash kills fish and damages the stream bed, hence they now can only use a raker bucket mounted on a digger, which requires land access along the bank. This costs about £5000 per kilometre; in wet ground it needs mats which double the cost, and where there are trees to be cleared the cost can triple. Before any work can be started, permissions from land owners, Natural England and confirmation of no risk from a whole list of utilities must be obtained. In some cases 50% of the budget is spent on preparations rather than 'useful work'. Parts of the New Cut were lined with asbestos in the 1960s to stop bank erosion in sandy areas and water loss into the marshes. Some 6 years ago the EA planned to replace the sluice from the Mumberry Marsh into the New Cut. This is on the upstream north side of the New Cut close to the Dam Bridge at Eastbridge. The steel pipe is still lying in the nettles close to the dam bridge. However on finding the asbestos, the work was stopped on health and safety grounds. Giles has obtained £K300 for asbestos related work and hopes that this sluice replacement work can be started soon as possible.

Following the heavy rain in May, the New Cut developed a severe leak into the RSPB reserve, making a breach about 6 feet deep and 10 feet wide through the asbestos lining. As an emergency repair the breach was filled by a clay cap, covering the asbestos. This is likely to be the economic repair method for any other failures of the asbestos lining.

At the sea sluice Giles commented that an EA employee recently working in the sluice gate chamber had sprained his ankle and it proved very difficult to extract him. E. A. employees are now banned from entering the sluice gate chamber until a safer work platform, access ladder and flood proof opening are made. This work is estimated at about £K100.

5. Longer Term Strategy for Suffolk Coast.

John Keeble and Dave Robb attended the 'Suffolk Estuary and Coast Conference 14 June 2008 at Southwold Pier on behalf of Suffolk County, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils. This proved to be a very interesting meeting, with excellent summary presentations on the overall development of Suffolk Coastal District council's strategy, the recent experience of the Blyth estuary with the storm flooding last November, and experience from Norfolk where the application of the Shoreline management plan is already causing considerable damage to the coast round Happisburgh. These presentations can be viewed see section 7 below.

MLSG is now a registered organisation with Terry Oakes, the consulting engineering working with Suffolk to formulate the new Shoreline Management Plan. The new SLMP was due for publication for consultation in July 2008, the latest estimates suggest late autumn for publication and discussion.

6. Future Programme

We have made direct contact with many of the key players and are increasingly recognised as a representative body that should be consulted. The coming months promise to be equally active, with the imminent publication of the Shoreline Management Plan, and also the outcomes of the consultation on East Suffolk Catchment Management Plan becoming known.

The next stakeholder group meeting on 3rd October will give you a chance to find out more about local drainage problems, and to raise your own concerns or comments about our group activities.

7. Useful web links.

These newsletters and the MLSG reply to Environment Agency's East Suffolk Catchment Flood Management Plan June 2008 are on the Theberton village web site: <http://www.onesuffolk.co.uk/ThebertonPC/>

The presentations at the Suffolk Estuary and Coast Conference 14 June 2008 are available at : <http://www.suffolksmp2.org.uk/consult/index.php>

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