

Blyth Estuary Group: Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

13.04.2017

1 Introduction

The Blyth Estuary Group was formed in 2006 to oppose the Environment Agency's Blyth Estuary Strategy to abandon the defence of the river and the estuary by 2030, (ie within the next thirteen years). The group successfully disputed the evidence upon which this decision was based but failed to achieve a change of plan. BEG's aims are to protect and preserve the estuary and the harbour for as long as this is feasible.

The group comprises members of local councils, adjoining landowners, river users and other interested parties and includes three representatives from Walberswick: James Darkins, Richard Steward and John Nichols. The group meets as required under the chairmanship of Councillor Sue Allen (Waveney District Council).

2 Recent History

Without deviating from the long term policy of managed retreat, the government decided in 2015 to make one-off grants for schemes to improve local flood protection, following widespread flooding in the previous winter. A budget of £350K was allocated to works in the Blyth Estuary and the first phase of improvement, the rebuilding of the Ferry Road flood bank, was carried out in the autumn of 2015. In March 2016 EA abandoned the second phase extending to the Bailey Bridge on grounds of cost and the difficulty of concluding an access agreement with the Blythburgh Estate which owns about 40% of the river frontage.

The decision puts at risk the preservation of Robinson marsh, the flood protection of houses in The Lea, the future of the river bank for moorings and as a pedestrian route to Walberswick and the sustainability of Southwold Harbour.

The issue of cost arose because, after the budget was set, EA decided that it would be necessary to import lime to mix with site excavated material to meet the specification. With the agreement of EA, BEG subsequently commissioned an independent review of the data which concluded that the original specification was excessive and the addition of lime was not necessary.

Whilst there are disagreements about the method and cost of remedial works, the key to progress lies in co-operation with the Blythburgh Estate. BEG, the Common Lands Charity and the Harbour Users Group continue to work together in the hope that a more constructive attitude may prevail.

The unspent budget of £200K remains allocated to the project.

3 Ferry Road

In order to improve flood protection in Ferry Road it is proposed to extend the EA's reconstructed bank south east from Old Vicarage Cottage to the seawall at Bell Green. Together with a hump and removable barriers across Ferry Road, the extension will protect Old Vicarage Cottage, Marsh End and properties in The Lea in the event of a tidal surge outflanking the Town Marsh bank.

The proposal has been the subject of a Pre App planning application to Waveney District Council and discussions have taken place with the EA and others including potential contractors. It is envisaged that the works will be carried out by WCLC with the assistance of members of BEG. WCLC is appointing consulting engineers to prepare a feasibility study and estimate of cost.

John Nichols