

## WALBERSWICK SEA DEFENCE – PUBLIC MEETING – 7 FEBRUARY 2009

Approximately eighty people attended the meeting which opened at 10.30pm.

Barbara Priestman, the Chairman, opened the meeting and explained the up to date situation. She stated that just over 2 years ago the first public meeting was held in response to village-wide concern about the effects of storm damage in the village and surrounding areas - and the Environment Agency's policy of "do nothing" to protect them.

The Sea Defence Group was formed and the first plan was to raise money to repair the shingle bank ourselves and, at the same time, put pressure on the EA to revisit its plans. Money was raised and pressure applied. SDG obtained legal advice, pro bono, from Lovell's - regarding planning consents and the constraints under which any construction work or digging would have to operate. Engineering advice was obtained from HR Wallingford.

The Blyth Estuary Group had already been formed and SCAR was just starting up, representing public concern about the future of communities and landscapes up and down the coast. SDG allied itself to both groups. It also talked to many experts and lay people, inhabitants of the village and visitors; read and researched a great deal so that a body of knowledge and experience was built up which was helpful when talking to EA and NE. Many meetings have since been held with them which have resulted in an improved understanding on both sides.

The Chairman also stated that a huge effort has gone into raising over £14,000 from a variety of sources. So far expenses stood at £5,800. She explained that they did not intend, at present, to call in the pledges that were so generously made 2 years ago. The bulk of the surplus has been deposited with the Charities' Official Investment Fund and the Village would be consulted when the Sea Defence Group needed to start spending it again.

David Webb had produced wonderful slides of the area which he displayed on the projector and he proceeded to show and explain the process of how the Sea Defence Group had reached their current position. He reported that the expert in barrier beaches, Dr Alan Brampton, had advised and agreed it was feasible to dig a new soak dike and use the clay from this to build up the existing bank, which was how the banks were first created well over a hundred years ago. This proposal was discussed with the EA and NE. While they were supportive of a self-help scheme they were unable to agree to a joint funded venture and stressed that a number of approvals would have to be obtained. NE stated we would have to prove that the environment would not be damaged and that they could not see us being able to do this. An alternative route along the seaward bank of the Dunwich River was suggested by NE., but the Sea Defence Group view was that this would not be cost effective.

Therefore, the conclusion was that the Sea Defence Group should consider undertaking the following work:

- a. Monitor shingle ridge and the inner bank
- b. Look at protecting the dunes between the beach huts and the harbour and 'East Point' bay. New fencing would be required.
- c. Consider raising the river wall from the Bailey Bridge to the Old Vicarage. This would involve working with other landowners.

David Webb introduced Richard Steward, who explained that despite recent investigations, which proved that their original River Blyth Strategy was flawed, the Environment Agency were going to proceed with their policy of ceasing all maintenance of the banks. This would ultimately mean the loss of the harbour walls, which were in a terrible state of repair and required the funding which depended on the assurance that the defence banks upstream would be maintained for at least twenty five years. If this was allowed to happen and the north dock wall failed, it would effectively close the harbour with the loss of all the moorings and hence businesses in the

harbour. If the Environment Agency cannot be persuaded to take responsibility for maintenance, landowners and local people will have to take action.

The meeting was opened to the public.

Mrs. Jenny Cardwell thanked David Webb for his excellent presentation and also the Group for all their work on the sea defences. She also thanked Richard Steward for pursuing the quest for saving the river walls. This was supported by all residents in attendance who thanked all who had worked on both the Sea Defence Group and the Blyth Estuary Group

Mr John Nicholls, who resides in The Lea, reported that the Environment Agency had stated that they would erect a ring bank to protect the Lea but assisted funding would be required. He considered that the Environment Agency was now taking definite steps to meet the concerns of the residents of the Lea.

Mrs. Pru Ford - Crush questioned the effect protecting the banks would have on the A12, as according to recent reports 1.85 million was being found to raise the road at Blythburgh. David Webb and Richard Steward considered that this would not be necessary if the maintenance work was carried out. County Councillor Leighton disagreed stating that Local Authorities had secured the money to raise the A12. He considered this to be of great benefit and stated that the Local Authorities were continually putting pressure on the government.

County Councillor Sue Allen, Chairman of the Blyth Estuary Group thanked Richard Steward for his tremendous work, stating that the Blyth Estuary Group would not be at this stage without his tireless contribution.

Barbara Priestman concluded the meeting by stating that unless we are willing to devote a lifetime and huge amounts of money to taking on the EA, we will not be able to change the law. However, much progress has been made She thanked David Webb and Richard Steward for their work and also the secretary, Vivien Hunt.

She stated that the residents would be kept informed of any progress and that local fund raising is likely to be necessary if the harbour walls, River Blyth walls and sea defences were to be protected for the future. It was in everybody's interest now to support the efforts of the Blyth Estuary Group in making the Environment Agency change its strategy and to support self-help projects by Blois Estates and other landowners, including the Walberswick Common Lands Charity Trust.

Current members of Sea Defence Group: Barbara Priestman (Chair), Vivien Hunt (Secretary), David Webb, Wally Webb, Maddie Dabbs, Robin Buncombe, Alvin Hunt, Mandy Aldridge, Brian Tibbles, Brian Morton.

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Viv Hunt (Clerk)