

21.04.2016

1 Sea and River Defences

The first phase of works to improve the river defences was completed by the Environment Agency in October 2015. The bank on the west side of Ferry Road car park, which was breached by the 2013 surge, has been widened and raised to give better protection to Town Marsh. The second phase, the restoration of the riverbank from the Ferry Hut to the Bailey Bridge, was to have resumed in May of this year.

However, within the last fortnight, the EA has announced that it is abandoning the project and leaving site. The reason given is that the tender for the work exceeds the budget by an unaffordable amount. The extra cost is due to the need, not previously anticipated, to treat the clay excavated from the marsh with lime, to achieve the specification required for the banks

The decision puts at risk flood protection in The Lea, the long term future of the river bank as a key route to Walberswick and the viability of Southwold Harbour. The Common Lands Charity and the Blyth Estuary Group are working together to persuade the Agency to carry out localised strengthening of the wall where it is most vulnerable to a breach and levelling the top to a constant height of 2.5Mod (the height of the wall at the Ferry Hut).

The BEG is also investigating other possible sources of funding. The unspent EA budget of £200K remains allocated to the project for the time being.

The Common Lands Charity will shortly submit a planning application to construct an extension of the Town Marsh bank from Old Vicarage Cottage to the sea wall at Bell Green. Access to the car parks and the properties at East Point will be maintained through an emergency flood gate across Ferry Road. The bank will protect Old Vicarage Cottage and Marsh View in the event of a surge, and prevent floodwater from outflanking the Town Marsh bank at its southern end.

2 Planning and Development Control

The Planning Advisory Group was established in 2014 at the Council's request to improve its response to planning applications referred for consultation by SCDC. The group comprises members of the Planning Working Party with professional knowledge and experience of planning and architecture.

The group's brief is to assess applications against national and local planning policy and to report its observations to the Parish Council. The Council will use the reports at its discretion and will continue to be responsible for commenting to the Planning Authority. Any member of the group with an interest in an application will not participate in its review.

In the period from September 2014 to the suspension of the Council in June 2015, the PAG considered eleven applications. A further seven have been reviewed since the Council became quorate in February of this year. In every case the group's comments have been incorporated into the Council's response to the Planning Authority. The majority of the applications have been determined in accordance with the recommendations of the Parish Council.

PAG reports are published in full as appendices to the minutes of the Council meeting. From May, subject to the decision of the Council, PAG reports will be posted on the Council's web page as they are issued.

3 Affordable and Sheltered Housing

The Housing Working Party report of 2014, posted on the WPP website, confirmed the view that helping young people to find affordable accommodation in the village and enabling the elderly to remain here for the rest of their lives were desirable and widely supported objectives. The report also set out reasons why conventional provisions such as sheltered housing and housing association estates were not feasible for Walberswick.

As an alternative, discussions have been held with the Common Lands Charity to consider whether the Trust could provide more flexible housing assistance in the village. This could take various forms: practical, financial, providing advice or some other service, depending on the needs of the time and the resources of the Charity. To supplement its finances in this respect, the Charity might appeal to the philanthropic instinct of the village to attract gifts and legacies in support of the aim.

4 Traffic and the 20mph limit

As reported elsewhere, a contractor will be instructed by Suffolk County Council to prepare the design for the implementation of the 20mph speed limit throughout the village. This will be completed within the next two months and then made available for comment. The proposals will be published in the Village News and on the village website, and presented at a public meeting.

5 Environmental Issues

Last year, the Environmental Working Party prepared reports on the impact of the growing numbers of visitors renting holiday accommodation in the village, and on the competing uses of the beach during the summer holidays. The reports were submitted to the June meeting of the Parish Council which was subsequently cancelled. They will be resubmitted in May.

6 Access to the Dunes

The Parish Plan Survey of 2011 noted a request for some form of disabled access to the dunes so that wheelchair users could get a sight of the beach and the sea. Representatives of the Steering Group and the Common Lands Charity are

investigating the feasibility of extending the existing boardwalk from the Cliff car park to a viewing platform at the crest of the dunes. This would have the additional benefit of channelling public access away from the marram grass plantations. Further information will be provided as plans develop.

7 WPP and PAG Membership

The members of the Parish Plan Steering Group are: Peter Byrne, Ben Cardwell, Frank Duffy, Alan Gomm, Alvin and Vivien Hunt, Chrissie Reeves and myself.

The members of the Planning Advisory Group are: Paul Bradley, Frank Duffy, Alan Gomm, Alvin Hunt, Brian Martin, Brian Morton, Bill Ungless and myself.

I would like to thank them for the work they have done on behalf of the village through the year.

John Nichols
Chairman, Parish Plan Steering Group