

# flood risk management

## Blyth Estuary draft strategy

We have overall responsibility for flood risk management in England and Wales. Our aim is to reduce the threat of flooding to people and property whilst achieving the greatest environmental, social and economic benefits in line with the Governments' principles of sustainable development. Over recent years there have been a number of major flood events, which have increased the demand for resources. In the face of such challenges we need to be sure we are getting the best value for money, and this means making difficult decisions. In many cases we will not be able to sustain the level of defence we have had in the past. To help identify sustainable ways of managing defences in the future, we are preparing flood risk management strategies in many areas.

## Managing change in the Blyth Estuary

Over past decades the Blyth Estuary has undergone significant change, to which local people have adapted. The estuary will continue to change over coming decades and climate change is likely to be the most important influence. Sea levels are likely to rise by up to a metre this century, and it is predicted that there will be more severe storms and tidal surges that will further threaten the flood defences.

To date, we have used public money to routinely manage many flood defences. These defences are now nearing the end of their useful life, and it will become increasingly difficult to maintain them in future or build them up in response to climate change. We now need to make important decisions about the future management of the estuary.

Over the last three years, we have prepared a flood risk management strategy covering the next 100 years. We have considered what is likely to be the most sustainable management option, taking on board the impacts of climate change and likely costs and benefits associated with various options. We have listened to the views of local people and interest groups and have also considered how important environmental assets in the estuary need to be managed.

We have permissive powers to manage flood defences but it is our policy to withdraw maintenance from defences where the costs of maintaining them are greater than the benefits. Flood management strategies are also being developed for other estuaries and coastal frontages in Suffolk and Essex.

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### What is the draft strategy?

The map shows the likely future shape of the estuary over different periods of time.

In response to our consultation in 2005, we have made some changes. We have withdrawn the proposal for a sill in the vicinity of the Bailey Bridge, and we no longer plan to undertake managed realignment of defences at Tinkers Marsh.

Considering the predicted impact of climate change and rising sea levels, and evaluating the likely costs and benefits, we are not in a position to replace any of the flood banks around the estuary when they reach the end of their life. This is partly an economic decision, but the wider sustainability of the defences is also an issue.

We will maintain the defences either side of the harbour downstream of the Bailey Bridge for the remainder of their life, which we estimate to be about 20 years. If any of these walls are subject to major breaches or significant deterioration within that period, we will have to consider whether continued maintenance is justified. This does not include the harbour walls that remain the responsibility of the harbour authority.

The flood bank fronting Reydon Marsh is nearing the end of its life, is in very poor condition and is on very poor foundations. We will seek to maintain the bank for the next 5 years, but it may become irreparable in that time. We will also look at options for strengthening Buss Creek to help protect Town Marsh. In the mean time we will be working with Suffolk County Council and others to investigate alternative ways of managing flood risk to roads and footpaths in this area.

We will withdraw maintenance from flood banks and defences in the rest of the estuary.

Above the A12 the defences on both banks have already failed. We do not plan to rebuild or repair these banks. Opportunities for habitat creation are being explored in this area. We will look at this area in more detail to see whether local flood protection measures are needed for properties.

**customer services line**

**08708 506506**

**[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)**

**incident hotline**

**0800 80 70 60**

**floodline**

**0845 988 1188**

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### Strategy Implementation Plan

Item	Description	Location
<b>years 1 to 5</b>		
1	Investigate local flood protection measures for isolated properties on the margins of the floodplain.	Any relevant areas including Walberswick, The Denes and Blythburgh
2	Maintain, and investigate options for strengthening the embankment along the east bank of Buss Creek up to the recently rebuilt cross bank near Botany Marshes.	Woodsend Marsh
3	Seek to maintain the existing defences along both banks of the River Blyth channel downstream from the Bailey Bridge to the mouth of the estuary (excluding the harbour mouth defences) in the short term (next 20 years).	Havenbeach Marshes Town Marshes Woodsend Marsh Robinsons Marsh Buss Creek marsh
4	Continued maintenance of Reydon embankment for 5 years subject to review in the event of significant damage. Failure of the defence protecting Reydon marsh would potentially also flood Hen Reedbeds.	Reydon Marsh
5	Withdrawal of maintenance.	Bulcamp House Union Farm Marsh Blyford Marsh Tinkers Marsh Blythburgh East Blowers Marsh Blackheath
<b>Short Term (5 Years)</b>		
6	Withdrawal of maintenance.	Reydon Marsh Hen Reedbeds
<b>Medium Term (20 Years)</b>		
7	Withdrawal of maintenance on defences downstream of the Bailey Bridge as they reach the end of their life.	Havenbeach Marshes Town Marshes Woodsend Marsh Robinsons Marsh Buss Creek Marshes
8	Consider construction of a rock groyne at Gun Hill.	Southwold coastal frontage

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### What would be the consequences of this draft strategy?

In the next few years, we expect there to be little change to the majority of the estuary provided that there are no major storm surges. An exception to this is upstream of the A12, where low defences protecting farmland have already failed. This area will be more frequently flooded in the future, and is likely to become a mixture of saltmarsh and mudflat in the lower areas, with some freshwater habitats further upstream. The A12 itself will be subject to more frequent flooding, and we are working with Suffolk County Council to see how this may be resolved.

Over the next 5-20 years, the agricultural defences fronting Reydon and Tinkers Marshes are likely to fail to the point where they could not be repaired, and this will result in significant change to the estuary. Where this happens, inundated farmland will become tidal. This will obviously affect existing land-use, but may provide new opportunities that we are keen to explore with landowners. For example, some areas may be suitable for the development of new wetland nature reserves that could provide a new focus for visitors to the area.

More water will be drawn into the estuary on each tide, and this will increase flows through the harbour. This may impact on the way people use the river and the harbour for recreation and business.

Failure of defences over the coming years will result in significant changes to the network of footpaths around the estuary.

In accordance with our commitments under the European Union Birds Directive, we will create a new reedbed to replace the area that will be lost at Hen Reedbeds .

### Will there be increased flooding to properties?

The main defences that protect Walberswick are not reviewed by this strategy, but we will continue maintenance at present. Most properties in Walberswick that are protected from flooding today are not affected by this strategy. However, there are a small number of properties on the edge of Walberswick (behind the Robinsons Marsh bank) that are only protected from smaller storm surges. These properties will be subject to increased flood risk. There are also properties along The Denes and at Blythburgh that are at risk of more frequent flooding in the future.

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Following adoption of the strategy our top priority will be to consider future flood risk changes to these properties and infrastructure. In collaboration with relevant property / landowners, we will consider whether cost-effective solutions can be developed to provide localised flood protection.

## How will withdrawal of maintenance affect me as a landowner?

Where we intend to withdraw maintenance from a bank that protects agricultural land, we will discuss the implications with the landowner and subsequently issue a formal letter of our intention. The letter will explain the period of time before we withdraw maintenance, and will provide advice on future options for managing the land. We are aware that some landowners may seek to maintain their walls themselves. We will offer advice to landowners that wish to do so.

## Where can I find more detailed information?

A Strategic Environmental Assessment has been prepared which identifies the environmental impacts of the strategy. A copy of this is available to view in local libraries at Southwold and Halesworth, at the Environment Agency offices at Cobham Road Ipswich, or can be downloaded from the Suffolk Estuarine Strategies website [www.suffolkestuaries.co.uk](http://www.suffolkestuaries.co.uk)

## How can I register my views on the draft strategy?

We have tried to meet the concerns of stakeholders during preparation of this draft strategy, but we are aware that what we are now proposing does not meet all aspirations. Whilst economic constraints are unlikely to allow radical change to the final strategy, we welcome your comments on the proposals. We will take account of all comments received **by Friday 4th January 2008** before finalising the strategy. We hope your comments can help us develop low-cost approaches to reducing flood risk locally.

You can write to us at: Blyth Estuary, The Environment Agency, Kingfisher House, Goldhay Way, Orton Goldhay, PE2 5ZR or email [blythestuary@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:blythestuary@environment-agency.gov.uk)

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# Likely Future Estuary Shape

Assumes 3rd parties do not maintain defences



- Current spring tides
- Spring tides after 5 years
- Spring tides beyond 20 years

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