

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT THE BEACHCOMBER
ROOM, SOUTHWOLD PIER, SOUTHWOLD
AT 6PM ON MONDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2005**

Bill Forbes welcomed John Gummer MP and all those present to the meeting.

John Gummer asked for submissions of what is intended and then the meeting will be opened up to questions.

Bill Forbes, Area Manager of Anglian Region, Eastern Area of the Environment Agency welcomed everyone to the public meeting and thanked them for coming. He introduced his colleagues:-

Mark Johnson (MJ) – Area Flood Risk Manager
Nigel Pask (NP) – Project Manager
Mike Steen (MS) – Suffolk Estuaries Strategies Local Liaison
Sarah Sinclair (SS) - Black & Veatch Consultants
Debbie Sheldrake – Secretary

Bill Forbes said it is important to consult with as much of the local population as possible. The coastline has been dynamic for centuries. Climate change has exacerbated that situation. Sea levels are rising and we predict they will continue to rise. In addition, we predict there will be increased storminess which will add more frequent storm surges to ongoing sea level, thereby increasing the risk of future flooding. We have an enormous challenge to face locally. The majority of people do not want change and want the EA to hold the line. We are listening but there is a conflict because at national level it is not seen as justifiable to hold the line everywhere. At consultation we have heard the messages and have looked at the solutions we know you favour. Some do not work and some cannot be justified. Consultation has informed the process. In 2004/05 the EA spent in the region of £355M on flood risk management. This year the figure is £466M. Within the region (Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex) we have a budget of £43M, comprised in part of £25M capital, £8M maintenance and £2M local levy. The EA's flood defence powers are permissive, that is discretionary. There is no statutory duty to provide flood risk management in the UK. Every pound spent has to be justified because it is tax payers' money. Therefore we always start with the do nothing option which identifies the impacts of what would happen if we did nothing. Then we look at the options and the benefits associated with the scheme. When we have a scheme we have to apply three tests: - (1) Is it technically possible? (2) Is it environmentally acceptable? (3) Is it economically viable? To work this out we have to undertake an analysis given by the Government which requires us to calculate the cost of the scheme, together with the benefits associated with it. The Government will not consider a scheme where the benefits do not exceed the costs. There is a prioritisation of these schemes. This is a point scoring system which we have to apply to all the schemes we put forward for funding. Currently, unless the scheme scores 19 points on the Government scheme then none of the £25M capital expenditure can be spent on any of those schemes. The only uncertainty in the future is what the point scoring will be. The Government will

set the level when it knows how much it will spend on flood risk management in the future. There is an additional test that we have to pass, which is your test, and that is planning permission. For almost all of our schemes we would look to apply to the local planning authority for permission to implement the scheme. If it is not wanted by the local community or local authority we would have to modify it.

BF handed over to Nigel Pask, Project Manager

NP explained why a strategy is needed. The estuaries are very complex so we need to be able to understand how the estuary is changing. The east coast is under pressure. Changes in the estuary have a linkage with changes on the coast. We need a sustainable plan to form the vehicle for our bid for funding. The estuary as it is today is man made and man managed. We have two options: - (1) Continue to manage the estuary or (2) cease managing and allow the estuary to evolve by the influence of nature. Sea levels are rising and in the estuary this means increasing water levels. The amount of water going in and out of the estuary is increasing. We are getting a continuing loss of saltmarsh. The channels are widening. This means that the stability of the banks is being reduced. The estuary changes as more energy comes in the estuary and it will want to widen and deepen the channel. Probably the greatest influences of man's management are the two harbour arms which are very close together causing a high tidal velocity. The main problems in the estuary are between the two marshes upstream of the Baileys Bridge. Tinkers Marsh to the south and Reydon Marshes to the north. Endeavours have been made to raise and strengthen these defences in the past but have had limited success. If Reydon Marsh defence was to fail, the tide flooding in and out of this area would increase the velocity and flow by 100%. Tinkers Marsh is higher and smaller but it is a European designed site, a Special Protection Area (SPA). If it were to fail we would have a commitment to replace that area of habitat elsewhere. Our proposals in summary are as follows:-

- The northern harbour arm fixes the north of the estuary from Reydon Marshes to the sea.
- To retreat at Tinkers marsh to allow the river to widen south (and keep stress off Reydon Marshes to the north).
- Install a sill in the area of the Baileys Bridge to increase the lifespan of existing embankments upstream of the A12.
- In the medium term (20-50 years) we see Robinson's embankment being eroded by the channel southwards.
- In the longer term (50-100 years) rock groyne to replace the north harbour arm.
- The harbour mouth will widen due to failure of the south harbour arm.

NP asked assuming we are just looking at the flood risk management needs what are our constraints? The three tests BF mentioned earlier. If we do nothing the existing system will continue to work for some time but it will fail unexpectedly and if Reydon Marshes defence fails there will be major changes very quickly. If we do not put a sill in we will fail to get the maximum life out of the existing investment. The issues to date are:-

1. The sill – its position and its effect on navigation and siltation.
2. Robinsons Marshes – its flood risk, loss of footpath and cost of moorings.
3. Harbour arms and their long term future.

4. Upstream of the A12 loss of footpath on the embankment and change in flood risk.
5. Habitat replacement compensation for the habitat on Tinkers Marsh.

Mr Gummer said he wanted to draw out certain areas to make things easier. Although the Environment Agency is bound by the mechanisms with which the Government provides it does not seem to be sensible to expect that they must be right. It would be unfair to blame the EA representatives for those guidelines so please treat them kindly as it is not their responsibility. However, if you are presented on the one hand with the clear danger of doing nothing but on the other hand with a stop on the possibilities based on a system of cost benefit analysis and at the same time the need to reach the figure of 19 points specified in the Government's criteria, you do have an artificial answer. Whatever is proposed if it is not within the budget it cannot be considered. The difficulty with cost benefit analysis in this area is that the costs and the benefits are not held by the same people. Often the cost is borne by the people who do not get the benefit of the change taking place. The tax payer does not want to pay for the disbenefit. Mr Gummer hopes they will try to explain what it is about the proposals that specifically affect them and their interests without a reference as to whether this means they can keep their proposals within the costs that are allowed. The community could say to the Government these proposals are not satisfactory but what we want is satisfactory and the fact that what we want does not meet your cost benefit analysis and budget constraints is not something we are prepared to accept. This problem has arisen all along the coast.

Climate change does mean that this is all much more expensive. It also means the Government might not have provided enough money to deal with the changes brought about by climate change. We should not start by assuming the money allowed by the Government is enough.

Mr Gummer thinks that it is important that the consultation is not corralled into a series of answers if we do not think they are the best option.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Robin Buncombe – Walberswick Parish Council

Mr Buncombe asked the reason for the change between the original options and the EA's preferred options.

Graham Hey Davidson – Chairman Southwold Harbour and River Users Association

Over the last few years we have been attending meetings chaired by the EA to hear their projects and proposals and what is going to happen in the river Blyth. We were presented with 6 options. The majority of people elected for option 5. We recognise the fact that work must be done and elected for option 5a. Unfortunately, the preferred option bears little relationship to this option because the essential requirement was leaving the harbour and moorings intact. Now the sill will be placed in the harbour between the Baileys Bridge and the Blackshore cottages. The EA have blighted between 20 and 40 moorings. Boats will only be able to get over the sill at high tide.

Mr Gummer asked why it is that option 5a has been excluded and replaced by another option.

NP said that the EA made the point that the 6 options proposed in the shortlisted consultation were building blocks. Since doing the shortlisted options nearly 12 months ago we have undertaken further work. We had put in investment to look at the whole range of options to bring them down to 6. We have then taken on board the responses from the consultation and done further work at each point to look at the three tests that must be satisfied. We have looked at how the estuary processes want to work. In our preferred option is our knowledge of 12 months ago enhanced by the work done since, together with the responses received. We now have as the preferred option a combination of options 4 and 6 to be implemented over the 100 year spectrum.

Mr Gummer asked when you came to look at 5a did you decide that it was not suitable for environmental reasons or technical or economic reasons?

SS referred to the problems on this estuary and why it needed the strategy in the first place. Estuaries are generally trumpet shaped with the widest part at the mouth. The Blyth is exactly the opposite. It has been man managed for such a long time. The upstream widening and the fact that every tide water flows up the river to fill the wider area means there are huge amounts of pressure on Tinkers and Reydon marshes. When we looked at the option of narrowing and holding the line in detailed modelling we found that, although we can keep the narrow part of the channel where it is for a very short time, sea level rise and the estuary being out of balance means it will change. Hold the line is not viable technically. The sill narrowing rather than shallowing means it did not have the effect we needed it to have. The sill needed to reduce any negative effects downstream. The narrowing did not do that but the shallowing did.

Mr Gummer asked what time scale we are talking about. For how long could it operate the status quo before being breached?

SS advised that one of the things we were trying to get across at the shortlisting option stage was that the reasons the options might be combined is that an option that works now might not work in the future. The Tinkers and Reydon channel restriction and the very poor condition of the defences that have been under so much pressure for so long means that it is likely that within the next 5 years one of them will fail. If we do not want Reydon Marshes to fail then Tinkers Marsh will have to be let go. However downstream to the Robinsons Marshes area we have estimated a 20 year time frame but this depends on the actual rate of sea level rise over that time. Part of the strategy entails monitoring, planning and going back and making sure what we have planned is still relevant and appropriate.

Mr Gummer asked can we take it that the proposal is changed because technically 5a will not work and if it did would it only work for 5 years?

Paul England – Southwold resident

Mr England would like to know how many points this scheme scores out of 42. Are we allowed in the public domain to see how the points are built up?

NP advised that the scoring arrangement has a maximum of 42 points. The proposals are cost beneficial but not massively so. Tinkers Marsh is a European habitat area so it is a statutory duty to undertake that part of the work. On the benefits side, there are not a large number of properties in the flood plain. Our benefits are very much dependant on usage of the estuary from tourism, walkers, navigation, etc. We are in the process of confirming with DEFRA that this is acceptable.

Mr Gummer asked if a proposal has been costed to keep the river, to the maximum extent possible, as it is so that we can measure these figures?

NP advised that the cost was estimated to be between £45-£50M to hold the line of the existing estuary for the next 100 years. That is replacing and maintaining structures etc of the same type. Analysis of work at this high level stage means you have to add 60% for uncertainty.

Steven Macfarlane – South Wall Harbour Committee

This amount would make a radical difference to what we want to achieve. Is putting a sill in and letting Tinkers and Reydon marshes go £45-£50M worth?

NP said we have to use the plus 60% figure. In the next stage we are looking to demonstrate that we have more confidence in our costs to ensure they are realistic and to justify them. The works are – to continue to protect the A12 to existing standards, the sluice at Wolsey Creek, flood defences at Blythburgh, the whole frontage from Wolsey Creek to the north harbour arm. We are looking at maintaining, replacing and renewing those structures. There is also the replacement habitat, the sill to put in and take out later, the existing defences in the harbour area to maintain their effectiveness against sea level rise and the rock groyne proposed in the eventuality of the north harbour arm not being replaced.

Steven Macfarlane –You are exacerbating the flow rate problems by allowing more water to go in and out. The money spent replacing habitat upstream would be better spent maintaining habitat that is already there. The less water allowed in and out of the harbour the less problems there will be. Your strategy is designed to increase water flow in and out of the harbour.

Mr Gummer asked what the additional cost would be in general terms to repair the defences so that the river would remain as it is?

NP said there are too many what ifs. NP offered to meet Mr Macfarlane and to go through his argument step by step to show him why that answer does not stack up.

Mr Gummer said we must know how much more expensive on top of the £45-£50M holding the line would be for the next 100 years so we have some idea of what we are talking about when we say we are not happy with the proposals.

NP said in generic terms it would be something in the region of 25% extra for holding the line – if it was viable. Holding the line will mean chasing our tails. With sea level rise the structures will get more expensive with time.

Mr Gummer said this is a sensible option. We have always been chasing our tails but now for the first time we are saying we are not prepared to pay an extra 25%. It does seem to be an odd argument that a lot of water goes in so we are going to increase the areas in which the water can be so there will be more water.

NP explained by starting at the top of the estuary. Upstream of the A12 the quantity of the water going in and out of the estuary on a day to day basis (not on surges, etc) is a small amount of water compared to what is currently coming into the estuary. At Tinkers Marsh where we have unsustainable existing defences as they are constructed, we have determined what the extra water flowing in and out of Tinkers Marsh would be and estimated what this will be in about 5 years time - it has a low impact. We have also looked at what the effect of a breach of Robinsons Marshes defence is over the threshold of 20 years time, at which time sea level rise would have increased the flows in the estuary. We have estimated sea level rise at an average over 100 years of 6mm a year. We have the effect that each year we have 6mm cumulative water coming into the estuary. The estuary is already under stress, mainly because of its unsustainable shape. From the modelling we can calculate what would happen with the change of velocity as flows increase. All the ground around the marshes is easily erodable. As velocity is increased the possibility of eroding the banks is increased. We have modelled and can accommodate the changes of water volumes in the estuary within the proposals we have made.

Mr Gummer said the model suggests that this is possible. If we take £50M as a top figure and take out 60% and add 25%, the cost of continuance of life as we have it is within the important figure of £45-£50M. It appears we get a figure that would come within the 19 points of the priority scoring system. Do we want a figure to meet the requirements of people who live here or a system which creates a figure which reaches the particular requirements of the Government.

Mr Bent

Mr Bent asked if the old Victorian restricter method had been considered instead of using the sill. He pointed out that Bulcamp and other marshes are flooding and suggested that they were deliberately breached to increase the flow of the harbour mouth. You can put the banks back.

SS said the 2 means of restriction we looked at were narrowing or shallowing. The principle we are looking at is to reduce the amount of water coming in and out of the estuary at each tide. The work we have done so far is a strategic level design. Further development of the design, which will take on board a lot of concerns about the sill, will be undertaken when we have the next stage of funding. We have offered to

demonstrate the work we have done so far at a meeting to be organised by Southwold Sailing Club who will represent the community as a whole and it is hoped these representatives will report back to the community.

Mr Bent said the Victorian restricter consists of a pyramid cut in half and put in the water with a flat edge against the incoming tide and a sloping edge against the ebb tide.

SS said at the moment we have looked at a high level design which is flat. When we look at how best to design the structure we may incorporate some of these principles.

Simon Loftus

The banks to the marshes started failing in the 1930s and became increasingly difficult to maintain. They were breached in the war. During the 1950s an attempt was made by the Henham Estate to rebuild some areas near the A12 before they failed again. The walls could not be reinstated.

Marcus Gladwell - Southwold Harbour

Is there an ulterior motive in what you are proposing rather than defending what we have got, ie if you let the harbour entrance go you will end up with progressive siltation and a harbour that is not useful and you will have no responsibility for it if there is not enough water coming in and out of it.

NP advised that the EA is not responsible for the harbour walls. We have looked at what the harbour walls do for flood risk management and what we can justify in the area of the harbour wall. The north harbour arm is an important structure for the estuary and the coastline. The south harbour arm is not so important.

Marcus Gladwell – If the harbour entrance did deteriorate considerably you would not have to foot the bill for anything further up the river.

NP said we have not taken the deterioration of the harbour arm in any of our costs.

We recognise this was not a very good answer and provide the following additional information:-

The nature of the harbour entrance whilst possibly affecting navigation will not have an impact on our proposals for flood risk management of the estuary.

Jonathan Adnams – Owner of stage 30 and Managing Director of Adnams

It is quite clear that your strategy is not a strategy for the future of Southwold harbour. You have disregarded other people's interests in your process. Whilst Mr Adnams sympathised with some of the problems he believes the future of the harbour is about moving together with other bodies to thrash out a strategy. There is one other option which did not feature in your review of putting in a lifting barrage or lock gates to the west of the Baileys Bridge giving total control of the water flow up and down the river. It would be expensive initially but in the long term would give great control of the environment and allow people to have access for most of the time. During the neap tide periods you would not need to close such a structure at all.

NP said we did look at both barriers and barrages. Neither is viable in this instance. Barrages would affect intertidal habitats upstream and barriers are too expensive and would not work.

Jonathan Adnams – Lock gates could be shut perhaps for 2 hours a day.

SS said we had looked at the possibility and they are not technically viable. The sill structure is technically the closest thing you can get that works in this estuary. We work internationally, learning and sharing experiences from all over the world. The Dutch have provided masses of infrastructure in the face of increasing sea levels and ongoing climate change and they are now moving towards the policy of making space for water.

Mr Gummer asked if lock gates are too expensive or would not work? Why would lock gates not have the same effect?

SS advised that lock gates would not work because we have proved that they would not operate to have the effect that we need to have on the estuary. Even the sill will be drowned out within 20 years or so as sea level rises.

Gentleman

Is it true that the sill or the barrage or the lock gates will be completely irrelevant if the marshes are abandoned?

SS said the sill structure has only ever been promoted as a temporary measure to slow down upstream effects. It will last about 20 years and will be taken out once sea level rise has made it a non-working structure. The point of removing it will probably be at the time when Robinsons Marshes will realign. The point is to slow down the erosion and give us as much time as possible.

Mike Fisher – Walberswick resident

The position of the sill is of concern. It seems to be closer to the harbour end. If the sill is to be there the sea defences are behind the buildings at Blackshore so in the event of a tidal surge where will that water go? Why is it not possible to put the sill around the area of the estuary mouth?

Mike Kippin

Why is a sluice not being considered? Is it technically not possible and too expensive? We should be starting with what Southwold wants not what the Government will allow us.

SS said the positioning of a sill should be around the Bailey Bridge. Our more detailed studies showed it would not work as well upstream of the Bailey Bridge. We are looking downstream of the Bailey Bridge. The actual location of the sill will be subject to the detailed design we have to undertake at the next stage. The expectation is that the sill will be a low structure and will be completely drowned out.

NP referred to Mr Kippin's suggestion of a sluice. He asked if Mr Kippin meant a barrier that can be closed and opened when the freshwater needs to discharge on the falling tide. That would leave the flood defences upstream needed for fluvial defence and land drainage. At the moment in the estuary we have intertidal habitat. If we go for a sluice this would not be a viable solution as the criteria for the three tests would not be met.

Mr Gummer said we need to know what these parameters are and what they mean. It is no good saying it is too expensive because we want to know by how much. We need to know whether it is technically possible. Everybody finds it impossible to understand why we have not had a statement of what it would take to keep the river in general terms as it is. What is the cost and what would be

the difficulties that would come along with the cost? We would then have a benchmark to measure the arguments. We think the reason we do not have a benchmark is because you do not want us to say we would prefer this alternative. None of the possibilities are satisfactory as we all feel we are put at a huge disadvantage. Can we have a very clear costing with the down sides and up sides for the river remaining as it is.

NP said we have always sought public consultation and have worked exceptionally hard to do this but it is only when we have put forward the proposals before us today that we have actually achieved effective public consultation. We have used a website and consulted widely with an extensive list of consultees and have been seeking the issues that our coming out today for some two years. NP would be pleased to let Mr Gummer and those present have the figures.

James Dawkins – Walberswick resident

- 1. In your economic impact assessment did you take proper account of the economic impact of losing the footpath from the Baileys Bridge to the sea because tourists arrive in that way?**
- 2. We are talking about letting Robinsons Marshes go in 20 years. What will happen in the intervening period if there is a breach?**
- 3. What is to stop the people of Walberswick maintaining the footpath for themselves?**

NP replied

1. We have taken account of the scale of visitor numbers so we have estimated expenditure by the visitors. Tourism and the intangible benefit it brings is very influential on the estuary.
2. We would look to have a clear statement in the strategy as to what is viable on the basis that the bank was to be breached by a storm as compared to a local wash out.
3. The EA would welcome landowners helping themselves to protect their land.

Peter Boggis

- 1. Mr Boggis expressed his strong support for what Jonathan Adnams put forward, ie a barrage. It would need to be of sufficient height and strength to last 100 years. This could be operated easily to give the normal tidal conditions inland of the Baileys Bridge but closed under severe conditions.**
- 2. The south pier of the harbour should not be abandoned. If the mouth of the harbour goes the effect will be that you will lose all the sand that is in front of Southwold. Due to the deterioration of the groynes this has not happened of late. If the harbour mouth is allowed to become wide it will disrupt the sedimentary drift.**

NP said the south wall of the harbour is not ours to abandon. That does not mean others who have compatible interests should not come forward to involve us with their discussions and developments. Southwold is potentially projecting into the sea and to the south Dunwich cliffs have a history of retreat over hundreds of years. Change always has a degree of uncertainty. The Southwold beaches will be recharged as part of the scheme with sand and shingle. It is assumed there will be further losses.

Mr Gummer thanked the Environment Agency for holding the meeting and answering questions. He said that we understand well that our concerns are not the fault of the EA but derive from the framework in which they have to operate.

It is widely felt we have had an unsatisfactory answer to three questions:-

1. We do believe that if there is to be proper consultation we want to have quite clearly costed the possibility of maintaining the status quo.
2. Why is it that lock gates, which could affect the flow of the water, are not part of the proposal?
3. To have an explanation why your proposal suggests having large amounts of water, which will be contained upstream, which it seems you were seeking not to have. We need to have an answer, which should be comprehensible to everyone here. There is a willingness to understand the weight being put on the environmental arguments because it seems every proposal is dealt with on three issues. All of the three criteria are only satisfactory if we have some understanding of what they really mean. We have challenged some of the technical issues. The environment also contains the human environment. On the evidence we have at the moment we do not have an understanding of precisely what you mean by the environmental demands. We need to know details, for example, of the sill and the placement of the sill. This is a crucial issue.

Mr Gummer requested a written response to these questions within 2 weeks. The answers to those questions will be distributed and put on the website within the consultation period. He thought this would give enough time for everyone to respond by the end of November.

In the consultation Mr Gummer has no doubt as to what people in the area want. They want to protect the river as it is for as long as is possible within reasonable economic measures. The cost of this not happening is enormous to the environment. Losing moorings and the harbour is not something people want to happen.

With reference to comments that the Dutch are moving in our direction regarding flood defences, Mr Gummer has looked at what is happening in Holland and said no Dutch Government or Environment Agency would dream of losing what the UK EA is suggesting we should lose in the Blyth. We have a right in this consultation to say that we want to keep what we have got. Please give us the facts so we will be able to feel we are properly consulted. At the end of it we will feel someone has looked at it not from the point of view that change is necessary.

Summary of questions/suggestions

- *It is suggested that providing more information on the environmental impacts and economic costs and benefits associated with the status quo would provide a benchmark against which local inhabitants could compare other options.*
- *It was questioned why lock gates or a similar barrage was not considered as an option.*
- *It was questioned why, and I quote “large bodies of water” will be contained upstream of the marshes when this seemed to be contrary to the main strategy.*
- *It was asked what weight environmental factors had placed on the various options.*
- *A timetable for decision-making for the strategy, and then the formulation and implementation of the final plan was requested.*
- *In addition, there was quite a lot of discussion about the sill and it would be useful to provide as much detail on the principles, construction, and position as possible.*