



Community Conference Report 4th September 2009

Alde and Ore Futures was launched on 4th September at Snape Maltings. It aims to involve all the local communities around the estuary in drawing up plans for the future of their area. 250 members of the community and key organisations were invited and over 100 attended.

Welcome

Cllr. Andy Smith (Deputy Leader SCDC and Chair of Suffolk Coast Futures¹ Executive Group) opened the conference and welcomed all the attendees. He confirmed that the goal of the Alde and Ore Futures project is to start to plan for the future for the area balancing the needs of the local communities with those of the environment and the economy. He explained that this was the first pilot project of the Suffolk Coast Futures, a partnership undertaking an Integrated Coastal Zone Management approach to the future of the coast.

He introduced the three presentations:

1) Facing the Challenge Together

The scale of this task was explained by Jeremy Schofield (Executive Director SCDC) who outlined the challenges and some of the opportunities the area faces including that of climate change (potential opportunities for tourism and challenges for food production, flood and erosion risk), socio economic factors (ranging from an aging population to high housing costs) and potential impacts on a highly designated and special environment. In addition, the increasingly difficult economic situation will require co-ordination and co-operation to attract funding for the area in future.

2) Integrated Coastal Zone management a Dutch perspective

To provide an international perspective Frank Duenk of Royal Haskonings (Netherlands) then outlined the approach taken on the continent to dealing with complex coastal issues. He explained the concept of "Polderen" or working together. This requires co-operation between government bodies, taking an area based approach and not just tackling water based issues e.g. flooding but also attempting to solve other issues (economic, social and spatial etc) at the same time. They use some basic principles including:

- Work with natural processes where possible
- Offer resistance (ie sea defences) where necessary
- Seize opportunities to foster prosperity and well being

Frank identified some key lessons that will be useful when thinking about the future of the Alde and Ore:

- Involve as many people as you can
- Develop an agenda with stakeholders about the future of the area
- Gain commitment from all those involved to make a difference
- Find solutions to multiple issues at the same time
- Do not try to solve issues that do not originate in the area itself.

His final comments were that working in an Integrated Coastal Zone Management approach is standard practice in Netherlands as it has been proved to work.

¹ Suffolk Coast Futures partners – East of England development Agency, Environment Agency, GO-East, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Suffolk Coast and heaths Unit and Waveney District Council.

3) Alde and Ore Futures

Bill Parker (Alde and Ore Futures project Manager) reviewed how our coastline is currently managed and that to have an integrated approach there is a need to 'glue together' national and organisational policies with local community priorities taking a holistic approach.

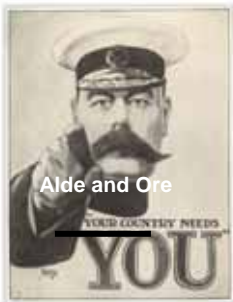
Suffolk Coast Futures (SCF) is a partnership between all those local councils and government agencies who initiated the Alde and Ore Futures project. This pilot covers the geographical area from Thorpeness to Shingle Street and inland to include Benhall to Hollesley – a total of 20 towns and parishes, covering 18,000 hectares. This Community Conference was the beginning of a process where the community and the Suffolk Coast Futures partners work together to develop a plan for the future of the area.

The aims of the project are:

- To find better ways of working between the community and local councils / agencies
- To create a framework plan that addresses the issues and links together other plans and strategies
- To find ways of winning and combining national, public and private funding
- To improve the way decisions are made about the future of the area

The timescales for the project is until 2031 but the project needs to recognise the longer term implications of issues such as flood risk.

Pilot Project



A step by step process was outlined which initially focuses on identifying the key issues and possible solutions (including funding ideas) for the area. Whilst many were identified at the conference, Topic Area work groups formed and chaired by volunteer members of the local community and supported by partnership officers will explore the detail through the autumn. The four Topic Area work groups are; Landowners, communities, businesses and infrastructure and the environment, access and recreation. These groups will be working together and were asked to report back at a follow-up conference next spring. The possible solutions to the issues will then be built into a framework plan which will be consulted on during 2010.

The Environment Agency Aldeburgh Coast and Estuary Strategy (ACES) which identify the strategy for flood and erosion risk in the estuary and the adjacent coast will be a component part of this project.

The framework plan will have specific actions identified and these will fall into one of the following options:

- To be implemented by the community, possibly with support from SCF organisations
- To be implemented by SCF partners but with community support
- The issue cannot be resolved locally and the evidence from Alde and Ore Futures work would be used to influence policy makers by SCF partners.

Progress of this project will be regularly monitored and the Estuary Planning Partnership for the Alde and Ore (EPP), a local community based organisation set up in 2004 to improve communication around the estuary, will be a sounding board for progress. The conclusion to the presentation emphasised that this is a pilot, we need to be realistic about what we can achieve and that any conclusions must be both legal and fundable.



Concluding Comments

Edward Greenwell, Chair of the EPP concluded the event by highlighting that in the past there has been inadequate consultations with the community and 'solutions' have been parachuted in that no one likes. In this process it is far harder to ignore local opinion as that puts the responsibility back on the community to engage with this work. The change in approach was welcomed and he looked forward to making a real difference.

In order to start the whole process, workshops were held to answer two specific questions and the responses are as follows:

Question 1 – What is special about the area?

It is important to understand why the area is so highly valued to ensure that future proposals support these aspects of the area. These key values included:

A very high quality environment with specific reference to; the landscape, the variety of natural habitats, the historic and cultural heritage, and other abstract ideas such as the skyscape, space and solitude

Specific locations were mentioned including the entire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Snape Maltings and Orfordness.

‘Quiet’ leisure opportunities such as; swimming, sailing, wildlife watching and walking.

A strong feeling for the way of life, expressed as; community spirit, village life, quality of life for children, a high standard of living and education, culture including art and music, and finally a great place for businesses

Question 2: What are you concerned about for the future of the area and why?

295 separate issues were identified that covered a broad range of issues. These can be brought together under the following headings:

Governance and legislation:

- Inappropriate government policy and contradictory legislation.
- Questions on who makes the final decisions that impact on the area.
- How do local solutions fit in with national priorities

Knowledge and involvement:

- There is a need for more public involvement and wider communication
- Science and its implications needs to be better understood.
- How is local knowledge collected and used?

Funding:

- Who will pay for any future work required?
- The impact of the historic lack of investment in sea defences
- Will those whose houses are flooded or lost be compensated (inc. human rights)
- Insurance cover issues

Housing / Ageing population:

- What happens to homes at risk of flooding
- There is a lack of affordable housing especially for young people
- Second homes have an impact on the structure of the local communities

Sustainable Communities /Quality of life / Education

- Concerns on the provision of and access to services (including health care) in a rural area
- Communities are fragile and may lose their distinctiveness
- Safety of people in a surge
- The effect on the community of an ageing population
- Poor representation from ‘younger people’ at the conference and generally
- The need to improve access to education

Recreation

- The loss of access to the coast and estuary and particularly to sailing and walking
- Loss of recreational amenities
- Stronger tides and its impact on the ability to sail

Infrastructure

- Poor broadband service
- Lack of sea defences against flood surges
- Access to key locations in the event of flooding
- Specific concerns for the long term over the security of community infrastructure (e.g. sluices, septic tanks and sewage works)

Traffic on local roads:

- Pressure on rural roads from large agricultural and other industrial vehicles
- Roads in poor condition which is unattractive to visitors
- The volume of traffic generating noise, pollution, busy car parks, clogging up of towns, carbon footprint

Access

- Lack of public transport especially for older / young people
- Lack of cycle routes, cycle facilities, danger to cyclists
- The need for a long distance coastal cycle route
- Concern over maintenance of existing rights of way

Landscape / Historic Assets

- Changes to the existing landscape, for instance the loss of saltmarsh
- The possible impact of housing and infrastructure development on the natural environment
- The impact on the landscape of new developments – e.g. electricity generation, power lines, rock armour.
- Loss of important historic assets

Agriculture and water quality:

- The importance of water management – particularly concern for long term supplies
- The contamination of ground water
- Irreversible loss of agricultural land – for food security, employment etc
- Intensification of agriculture – impact on landscape, decline of farmland birds, soil erosion, impact on water , soil, habitats and environment

Employment / Business development

- The lack of youth employment opportunities.
- Vulnerability of businesses / employment locations to flooding e.g. VT communications and Snape Maltings and generically e.g. pubs and schools
- Changes to landscape reducing attractiveness of area
- Lack of development reducing jobs in the recreational / tourism areas

There were in addition some other observations, these included:

a) There is a need to find a balance between competing interests such as:

- Tourism versus environmental qualities / Landscape
- Allowing versus restricting access
- Food production versus habitat creation
- Wildlife versus people

b) Some responses recognised that we live in a changing world but were concerned about;

- There may be some barriers to local people accepting the need to change
- The need for any proposed changes to be both realistic and progressive
- There is a need to adapt to climate change

c) Issues that are outside the geographical scope of this project;

- Improved access e.g. Train network, A12 development
- Impact of Sizewell developments
- Impact of sea defences within the area on the coast outside the project area

There were a number of key questions that were raised during and after the workshops including:

- **How is this going to be communicated to; people not here, those not invited and the wider community?**

Response – communication is a key priority, we need to use all possible opportunities, including articles will appear in the local press and other publications, for those who have access a to the web www.suffolkcoastfutures.org.uk with feedback forms and drop in sessions for the public. The Topic Area groups will have a responsibility to cascade information to their 'constituents', efforts will be made to be as inclusive as possible. (Bill Parker)

- **How will local knowledge be captured into this work?**

Response – local knowledge is very important and we will actively look to include it in the work as it progresses. (Bill Parker)

- **How do you manage national priorities with local preferences?**

Response – there is a need to define the local preferences, hence the start of the work today. The structure of organisations involved in this project will try to influence national policy makers with evidence where there are conflicts between national and local priorities.

- **How will work be funded?**

Response - the economic situation will be increasingly difficult but it is essential we know what needs to be funded and then work together to find multiple funding options.

- **What is the future of Slaughden and the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP)?**

Response - the SMP is currently out to public consultation (until 30/9/09) and all responses are welcome. There is a clear inter-relationship between the estuary and the shoreline at Slaughden and the SMP reflects this. More information is available at www.suffolksmp2.org.uk (Terry Oakes)

- **What is the Dutch view of the “UK elevating nature conservation above farmland”?**

Response – the Netherlands also has obligations under the European Habitat Directive just as in England (Frank Duenk)

- **Do the issues identified in the workshops today sound like those which are found in the Netherlands?**

Response – yes, these are very familiar, especially the need to support tourism. There is a significant difference in that sea defences are nationally funded (Frank Duenk)

Postscript:

Of the 44 participants who returned the event feedback forms:

- 84% found the conference overall to be excellent or good and 15% declined to answer.
- 96% believe that the Alde and Ore area will face major challenges in the future.
- 91% supported the Alde and Ore Futures approach for this area, 8% did not know or respond.



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