**Essex Coastal Forum meeting – Meeting Notes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date:** | 5th March 2019 |
| **Time:** | 10.00 – 12.00 pm |
| **Venue:** | Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH |
| **Chairman:** | Cllr Simon Walsh (SW) Essex County Council (ECC) |
| **Attendees:****In attendance:** | Andrew St Joseph (ASJ)Mark Nowers (MN)Cllr Ray Howard (RH)Trudie Bragg (TB)Andy Millar (AM)Cllr John Aldridge (JA)Cllr Arthur WilliamsMark JohnsonJohn Lindsay (JL)Nicky SpurrCllr James CourtenayJames EnnosNeil HoskinsTom PavittHelen QuinnellCllr Lee Scordis (LS)Michael CrossKat Dedman (KD)Cllr Mike Steptoe Jayne Rogers (JR)John Meehan (JM)Keith AgerPaul WhiteRoger LankesterRob Wise (RW) | Essex Coast Organisation (ECO)Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)Castle Point Borough Council (CPBC)Castle Point Borough CouncilNatural England (NE)Essex County Council (ECC) RFCC repRochford District Council (RDC)Environment Agency (EA)Environment AgencyEssex County CouncilSouthend CouncilTendring District CouncilSouthend CouncilMarine Management Organisation (MMO)Chelmsford City CouncilColchester Borough CouncilTendring District CouncilEnvironment AgencyEssex County Council (part of meeting)Essex County Council Essex County CouncilHullbridge Parish CouncilHullbridge Parish CouncilTollesbury Parish CouncilNational Farmers Union |

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies**

In addition to the attendees listed above, the following apologies were also noted.

Shirley Anglin (Essex Highways), Darren Braine (Natural England), Rebecca Bromley (Anglian Water), Paula Chapman (Rochford District Council), James Lamb (Natural England), Cllr Mark Platt (Essex County Council RFCC Member), Cllr Mick Skeels (Tendring District Council) and Matt Wilson (Maldon District Council).

1. **Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman**

NS advised that nominations for the position of Chairman and Vice Chairman had been invited by email in February and that she had received one response from Cllr Ray Howard. RH then proceeded to formally nominate Cllr Simon Walsh to continue as Chairman of the Essex Coastal Forum – this was seconded by Cllr John Aldridge and supported unanimously. Cllr Mike Steptoe was appointed in his absence as Vice Chairman, but on later arrival at the meeting, agreed to a further term of office.

1. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

ASJ – correction page 6 para 4 – in brackets is at North Fambridge not Althorne

Otherwise agreed

**Action NS :** To amend minutes reflecting change and circulate final version

1. **Essex Green Strategy – Jayne Rogers and John Meehan (ECC)**

Jayne Rogers started the presentation. 2 years ago, Cllr John Spence (ECC) highlighted the importance of green space in Essex and asked for this to be captured, so the decision to produce an Essex Green Strategy was made. A ‘knowledgehub’ website was established to enable input from a wide variety to partners towards the development of the draft Essex Green Strategy shortly to begin a stage of formal consultation.

A number of definitions for Green Infrastructure were considered with the following (a combination of the definitions used in the National Planning Policy Framework and by Natural England) being agreed;

“Green infrastructure is made up of natural and semi-natural assets and habitat types of green and blue spaces and other environmental features that maintains and enhances ecosystem services. It provides multi-functional benefits integral to the health and wellbeing of our communities and to the ecology and economy of the county. Green infrastructure is often referred to as a network of these natural and semi-natural assets and spaces which are joined together connecting urban and rural areas and are habitually strategically planned.”

John Meehan continued the presentation highlighting that 70% of Essex is ‘green’ and that there are multiple benefits of Green Infrastructure (GI). 7 key objectives were derived from approx. 25 proposals (grouped by theme). Marketing, branding and working in collaboration to promote each other’s assets were all important.

John advised that email addresses for further contact would be provided via the minutes.

**Action :** NS to provide email addresses for John and Jayne if further information was required by Members.

**Post Meeting Note :** John Meehan : john.meehan@essex.gov.uk, Jayne Rogers : Jayne.rogers@essex.gov.uk

**Questions**

RH endorsed the Essex Green Strategy and felt the presentation had been well received. He highlighted two previous initiatives on Canvey, where the value of green infrastructure had been recognised. One where an entrepreneur had purchased 1200 acres and submitted applications to develop a village in the place of 2 previous oil refineries. The application had been fought locally, with 800 acres finally being placed in public, not private, ownership in perpetuity. Funding subsequently secured to purchase the land which is now administered by the RSPB. After lying dormant for a while, the remainder of the site was purchased by the Land Trust and Canvey Wick Reserve created, again working with the RSPB. These 2 initiatives represent a high proportion of the 4500 acres total area of land on Canvey.

The closure of Tilbury Power Station whilst having had positive impacts in reducing air pollution, had had negative impacts regarding the loss of jobs. The land had been purchased by Tilbury Port with the intention of developing it, but there had been objections on ecological grounds. RH felt that a balance was needed between economic and environmental issues, as there’d been the potential for thousands of jobs to be located in the same position where there had been a power station for many years, on an island where there was already considerable provision for the environment including the areas highlighted above and also the Thames Estuary Path.

MJ questioned the geographical extent covered by the Essex Green Strategy and it was confirmed that it covered the whole of Essex including Southend and Thurrock.

ASJ highlighted the importance of privately owned land (by farmers) fir connectivity and was surprised not to see a recognition of this, especially of hedgerows, as Green Infrastructure. JM advised that the University of East Anglia had examined numerous functions including farmland and found the latter to be lacking in biodiversity with exception of hedges. JM advised that they weren’t dismissing the value of farmland but a view had been taken not to highlight areas of privately owned land as demand might follow to access these. The importance of Public Rights of Way (PROW) was highlighted and hoped that some of these will enable community walks and access to green space especially in areas where there aren’t big parks.

A link through to the consultation was considered necessary.

**Action :** NS to include a link to the consultation with the minutes

**Post Meeting Note :** The consultation runs from 3 May until 14 June - the link to the survey is <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/rci/green-essex-strategy/>

John Aldridge questioned the purpose of the strategy as he felt that without legislation, there was a risk that no subsequent action will be taken and gave the example of concreting over green areas. JM commented that many issues in the Essex Green Strategy are already covered by existing legislation including the concreting of driveways. JM also commented that the Recreational Access Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) which is in the process of being introduced provides an opportunity to protect the areas of most significant nature conservation value. So, there will be some protection of green space enabled through legislation and other aspects achieved through partnership working.

MN asked how this county wide strategy links to Local Authority (LA) Green Infrastructure Strategies. JR commented that the LA Strategies were reviewed as part of the development of the Strategy, but that further work is needed to ensure that it is culturally embedded in the LAs.

RW mentioned the linkages farmland can provide to the PROW network and the potential for permissive access to be used as a tool for communities to create circular routes that link with the Coast Path if co-funding of permissive access could be achieved. He highlighted a consultation (now concluded) recently undertaken by Defra and that the current Common Agricultural Policy regime of farm support will be replaced by a new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) where ‘public money will be paid for public goods. The consultation paper referred to public access as one of the public goods the government is keen to promote and this was further developed in the consultation on the draft 25 year Environment Plan. RW added that there has been little evidence to date from Defra on how they propose to take forward promoting public access. A link to the consultation paper can be accessed via this link <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684003/future-farming-environment-consult-document.pdf>. RW commented that the roll out of the Coast Path is as a linear path, but questioned the likely level of usage, due to the lack of linking access routes which would enable circular paths to be created. RW felt that ECC could look at willingness to pay examples from elsewhere in East Anglia (where communities have co-funded permissive access How can permissive access to enable circular routes to be created).

Another question re whether anticipated water resource demand is included in the Strategy was raised and JM responded that there are references to water in the Strategy which mainly refer to SUDS and schemes which ameliorate flooding downstream. JM advised that they are currently looking for solutions which can make use of the water that is held back in flood schemes. SW commented that there are comprehensive plans looking forward and a number of schemes being considered that could address aquifer deficit. JM also added that Anglian Water have a 25 year plan to plant 1 million trees and that they are in discussions with ECC over this.

1. **Essex Path to Prosperity (EP2P) – Nicky Spurr, ECC**

NS provided some background to the Coastal Communities Funding (CCF) stream. The focus is on projects leading to regeneration / economic growth and directly or indirectly creating or safeguarding jobs. ECC had been successful in getting through the Stage 1 application process of Round 5 and had submitted a Stage 2 application for an Essex Path to Prosperity Project (£925 000 total project value of which £663 000 CCF grant funding had been sought) - the outcome of the application was awaited.

**Post Meeting Note :** The application was successful and work is now underway, including liaison and engagement from LAs.

NS outlined the key aims of the EP2P project were to promote the coast and Coast Path in Essex and sustainable access to these to improve the ‘sense of place’, help to change perceptions about the county, provide business support, increase employment and business opportunities.

Activities would include

* An audit and scoping exercise would be undertaken at an early stage to identify appropriate themes for promotion and inclusion in an interactive digital tool which would enable itinerary creation by the visitor
* Pilot weekend hopper bus service
* Installation of location centric maps and improvements to infrastructure
* Promotion campaign
* Promotion of off peak branch railway line use
* Apprenticeships to address skills gaps
* Creative courses in art and photography at the coast
* Business support

NS highlighted that, if the application was successful, working in partnership, especially with the local authorities, would be key, to maximise the benefits that the project could bring to the county. Some specific areas where LA involvement would significantly affect the level of delivery were highlighted as being;

* to establish criteria for and site identification and permissions for installation of the location centric maps
* liaising with local businesses and community groups
* assisting with the identification of potential routes for the pilot hopper bus
* identification and assistance with additional promotional opportunities.

Questions

RH welcomed the presentation about the EP2P project as he coastal communities are key. He advised that Castle Point Borough Council had also submitted an application for £1.7million bid, but that they’d not heard back yet.

ASJ highlighted the synergy with the RAMS project which will have longer term funding, and a team of volunteers associated with deliver and considered that this work should be built on. JM – yes, there’ll be work by RAMS to reduce disturbance to wildlife and that it would be beneficial to use the expertise of that work.

LS commented that the level of skills gap is known and that this is an area which should be focused on.

It was commented that the pilot hopper bus scheme, sounded really good and that it would be good to look at this together with Districts to ensure the right attractions / features are included in the route. NS advised that this had already been identified as a key area to get District engagement on.

1. **Environment Agency Updates – John Lindsay and Kat Dedman, EA**

Shoreline Management Plan

The EA will prepare the report to Ministers re the Shoreline Management Plan Action Plan progress. A summary report, together with minutes of the SMPWG meeting and Action plan had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. JL highlighted some key areas of progress including that 2 actions had moved from progressing to complete and a total of 30% of actions are already completed for the 100 year plan.

A workshop held in 2017 had taken place to streamline number of actions to a total of about 80 actions. Attendance at Shoreline Management Plan Working Group meetings remained low which was disappointing and JL requested that Members encourage their officers to attend.

**Action :** Members to encourage their officers to attend future meetings of the Shoreline Management Plan Working Group

JL advised that no managed realignment (MR) sites were being progressed in the short term. The officer group had recommended a moderate change to policy development zone C4 from being a dual policy for Epoch 3 to one of Hold the Line. It had been recognised that it would be incredibly difficult to obtain formal landowner agreement to MR, but also that the change would support TDC’s regeneration objectives.

The formal agreement to the change of policy from the Essex Coastal Forum was sought – no objections were made and hence the change was duly agreed.

**Action :** JL to make amendments to the policy maps and circulate to the libraries which hold the hard copies.

Beneficial use of dredged material proposals

EA has a meeting scheduled with the Harwich Haven Authority where the previous sites that EA have highlighted will be discussed including the proposal from the Mersea Harbour Protection Trust. 2021 - 22 is the timeline for the capital dredge. It is not clear whether there will be a ‘smoothing of legislative hurdles’ to enable beneficial sites to be progressed as there is always a battle that this material is classed as waste, although the EA are seeking to change this. HHA are being supportive of the sites being considered but costs are also a significant factor.

AM considered some key conversations were necessary as the receiving sites for sediment are areas of eroding saltmarsh, and also conversations have been taking place with RSPB and ASJ over ecological considerations including little terns.

ASJ considered it important that legislative pathways are smoothed to enable this material to be used for this purpose and saw no reason why funding shouldn’t be secured from Bradwell B to fund this work. There was also a need to engage the MMO so that the cost of licenses wasn’t too expensive.

MJ advised Members that a SMP refresh (as opposed to a 3rd generation of SMPs) would be taking place to take stock of plans developed 10 years ago including to incorporate new climate change data and to reference the changes to funding.

Kat Dedman update re TE2100 – an update had been provided at the last meeting re the work the TE2100 team are doing with councils. She advised that a review would be undertaken in 2020 in line with the requirement for a light touch every 5 years, and more detailed every 10 years. The TE2100 team are keen for the document to become more user friendly and accessible to a wider audience, as well as being a much more partner developed plan with shared ownership. A survey regarding the 2020 review would be circulated to enable partners to highlight what they would want to see in the Plan.

**Action :** KD to forward a survey to ECF Members asking for views re the TE2100 update to take place in 2020.

SW asked re the anticipated time this survey would come out. KD advised that she wasn’t entirely sure. The scope is currently being developed following which the timeline will be determined.

RH : this is a very important subject which needs to have local knowledge needs to taken into account. It would also be important to consider any effects on Tilbury and Canvey Island of moving the location of the Thames Barrier. He expressed concern that scaremongering over sea level rise might have and didn’t want to see any unnecessary raising of sea walls if they weren’t needed. MJ responded that the Thames Estuary Strategy has a no regrets policy.

1. **MMO update and South East Marine Plan Consultation – Tom Pavitt, MMO**

Tom gave a short presentation which highlighted links on how to access the MMO implementation mapping project and also highlighted a public engagement on the 3rd iteration of the South East Marine Plan which concluded on 29th March 2019.

1. **Natural England updates -** Andy Millar, Natural England

AM highlighted that NE were currently resource challenged staff wise at the moment with many staff having been pulled in to Defra to consider wildlife laws needed as a result of Brexit. Much work was underway regarding permissions, particularly re Marine Licensing. AM also highlighted that the Coastal Concordat is mentioned in the Government’s 25 year Environment Plan – although this has been in existence for a number of years, many coastal local authorities didn’t sign up. The requirement for all to do so should smooth the decision making pathway between all decision makers to provide a single gateway for applicants / regulatory pathways. It was considered that this would be beneficial for both coastal communities and also for regulators

RAMS was considered to be vitally important with much work on this already underway in Essex, as well as across the rest of East Anglia. AM felt that Essex will play a major role although work in Ipswich and the River Deben is also underway.

Coast Path

Natural England are continuing to review alignment options on the ground on the yet to be published stretches (3 stretches from Tilbury through to Burnham-on- Crouch and Salcott to Jaywick.).  About 99% of this distance is resolved and NE are looking to publish these reports during the latter half of 2019.  NE has established a small team to review the potential interactions with international wildlife designations and ensure we are compliant with the ruling from People over Wind.  This team will help the Coast Path team with the publication of the 4 remaining stretches and also review the proposals for the 3 stretches already published but awaiting Secretary of State approval.  The one approved stretch (Maldon to Salcott) awaits a grant application from Essex County Council to fund the establishment works and does not need reviewing in light of People over Wind.

AM highlighted that Bradwell Nuclear Power Station is proving to be a large piece of ongoing casework. Regarding coast protection casework, much time was being involved with reviewing the figures associated with habitat creation etc. with the result that the amount of land required for habitat creation have been revised downwards on the Thames Estuary with the conversation still to be had over whether these works should take place in Essex or Kent.

ASJ raised a point that Darren had previously highlighted to Members’ attention i.e. that it couldn’t be guaranteed that any funding not spent on the Coast Path, could potentially be spent on other highways project. AM agreed to look in to this and gain clarity

**Action :** AM to check with the coast path team regarding the any ability for funding secured to be potentially spent on other highways projects.

It was also questioned whether the footpath can be routed using ferries e.g. across the Crouch rather than continuing up to the head of an estuary. AM replied that this depends on frequency of service with a degree of flexibility over the use of ferries seasonally etc. He highlighted that for Essex these matters were still there to be agreed and had not been ruled in or out

1. **Items to be noted** : None
2. **Any Other Business and next meeting**

MN updated re some work of the Essex Little Tern Group where Tollesbury Wick had been recharged with shell – there have been 2 successful fledge sites on the Essex coast and work continuing.

JL agreed to circulate a briefing re additional points not covered in the meeting.

**Action :** JL to forward a briefing to NS for further distribution to Members

RH advised that Mark Evershed had now left CPBC and that Trudie Bragg will be the officer attendee for the Essex Coastal Forum.

Roger Lankester from Tollesbury PC commented that Tollesbury no longer has a railway branch line or a Sunday bus service resulting in visitors therefore arriving by car to enjoy the coastal footpath and causing parking problems near the waterfront at the public car park. Tollesbury is designated a hub destination (by MDC) and was well advertised by Maldon DC tourism and leisure dept. There is now a desperate need to provide more public car parking space and RL felt that some of the ECC grant could be helpful towards this.

Date and Venue of next meeting to be advised but would be in early July. 2 offers had been received offering to host the summer meeting – one made by Cllr Williams at the ECF meeting last summer, and the other by the TE2100 team of the Environment Agency. The EA commented that they would like to show ECF Members Thamesside in order to bring to life and to build on the presentation made earlier in the year about the work of TE2100.

SW proposed that a decision regarding the summer site visit would be made outside of the meeting.

**Post Meeting Note : The next meeting would take place in Thurrock Council offices from 10.30-12.30 on 2nd July 2019 and would be followed after lunch by a site visit hosted by the Environment Agency.**