**Essex Coastal Forum meeting – Meeting Notes**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date:** | 2nd July 2019 | |
| **Time:** | 10.30 – 12.30 pm | |
| **Venue:** | Council Chamber, Council Offices, Thurrock Council, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL | |
| **Chairman:** | Cllr Simon Walsh (SW) Essex County Council (ECC) | |
| **Attendees:**  **In attendance:** | Mark Johnson (MJ)  John Lindsay (JL)  Mark Nowers (MN)  Andrew St Joseph (ASJ)  James Ennos (JE)  Matt Wilson (MW)  Trudie Bragg (TB)  Mark Platt (MP)  Paula Chapman (PC)  James Lamb (JLa)  Helen Quinnell (HQ)  Cllr Mark Durham  Catherine Bailey (CB)  Richard Hatter (RH)  Nicky Spurr (NS)  Kat Dedman (KD)  Phil Spearman (PS)  Kevin Lester –technician  Steve Plumb (SP)  Roger Lankester (RL)  Izzy Donovan | Environment Agency (EA)  Environment Agency  Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)  Essex Coast Organisation (ECO)  Tendring District Council (TDC)  Maldon District Council (MDC)  Castle Point Borough Council (CPBC)  ECC Regional Flood and Coastal Cttee (RFCC)  Rochford District Council (RDC0  Natural England (NE)  Chelmsford City Council (CCC)  Maldon District Council (MDC)  Colchester Borough Council (CBC)  Thurrock Council (TC)  Essex County Council  EA (part of meeting)  EA (part of meeting)  Thurrock Council  Thurrock Council  Tollesbury Parish Council  RSPB |

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies**

The following apologies were noted : Cllr John Aldridge (ECC), Shirley Anglin (Essex Highways), Cllr Martin Goss (CBC), Cllr Gerald Rice (TC0, Cllr Mike Steptoe (ECC), Cllr Arthur Williams (RDC), Rebecca Bromley (AW)

1. **Minutes and Matters Arising**

Item 4, page 3 : Consultation for the Green Essex Strategy consultation extended to 5th July 2019.

ASJ commented on the statement (p 3 para 5) re the low biodiversity value of agricultural land (with the exception of hedges) as farmers are also responsible for ‘unmanaged’ grassland which is very high in biodiversity.

Agenda item 6, p7 : Re the use of dredged spoil for beneficial use.

RL commented that the Crown Estate had implied that they might be charging to permit asking for £1.63 for placement of material on their property. It was felt that this could potentially kill dead the chance of re-establishment of saltmarsh.

**Action : NS to follow up with Crown Estate**

**Post meeting note : Peter Riches (representing Crown Estate to present at the next ECF meeting)**

ASJ asked for clarification over John Meehan’s comment that ‘70% of Essex is green’ and SW responded that it related to 72% of the county being rural.

Otherwise minutes were agreed as accurate.

1. **Bathing Water Quality in Essex**

Unfortunately Rebecca Bromley (Anglian Water) who had been due to give a presentation on this item, had had to send her apologies to the meeting at the last minute.

1. **Recreational Access Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) – Steve Plumb (SP), Thurrock Council**

SP is part of the Steering Group for the project and would update the Forum with progress made since an earlier presentation made to the Forum a year previously.

A huge proportion of the Essex coast, including the estuaries, is recognised as being of international importance. The county is also expected to see large numbers of residential housing and the issue of potential disturbance caused by these residents on the environment had been recognised.

Natural England has highlighted to Local Planning Authorities that, due to the Habitats Regulations, the impact of these residents must be considered during the preparation of their local plans. Consequently, the local authorities with coastlines had initially come together to explore potential mitigation measures. Visitor surveys were conducted during late winter / early spring to establish where visitors coming from with the results showing that the majority of people were local, but on the Blackwater Estuary visitors were coming from further with the zone of influence extending up to 20Km. As a result 12 of the 14 local authorities were now involved as their residents were considered to have the potential to affect the international designations and appropriate mitigation needed to be provided.

People walking along seawalls was considered a potential disturbance to birds especially during nesting and overwintering. RAMS addresses the potential impacts of the return of regular users rather than tourism related projects with new tourism attractions being required to carry out their own Habitats Regulations Assessments.

An Essex-wide RAMS approach was considered most appropriate to avoid each Local Authority having to do separate surveys to establish their own zones of influence etc. A RAMS approach would also ensure a consistent methodology was adopted and duty to cooperate requirements were addressed. Developers would also prefer this approach to avoid having to conduct their own sites surveys etc. A standard tariff would be applicable across all authorities.

Measures would include increasing education and employing on site rangers / wardens etc. Also more tangible improvements including to the surface to discourage people from straying off the path, with alternative routes being considered where appropriate. Habitat recreation could potentially be included if it can be demonstrated that there is a need for a greater buffer to the internationally designated areas.

The tariff had now agreed and the delivery stage was now being considered working in partnership with NGOs. Ongoing monitoring surveys would be undertaken and the Zone of Influence amended as needed, as the initial survey had only captured visitors in winter / early spring. The strategy had now been completed and approved by 5 Local Authorities. A supplementary planning document was being prepared with likely consultation during the summer.

An accountable body would need to be established if staff are to be employed, with both Chelmsford City Council and Southend Council being interested in undertaking this role. Financial and Legal support also needed to be considered. The Essex Planning Officers Association would provide technical support. It was suggested that the Essex Coastal Forum provides an overview scrutiny role to ensure that what is being actioned is actually appropriate etc.

**Action : NS to liaise with Chelmsford City Council / relevant officers working on RAMS to develop a proposal for ECF to consider.**

The name ‘Recreational Access Mitigation Strategy” would be amended. In the Solent / Kent, the terminology “Bird Aware” has been adopted, which was felt more appropriate. The same branding would also be applicable to developers who might cover both of these geographical areas.

**Post Meeting Note :** The Bird Aware Essex coast website is now live - See [https://essexcoast.birdaware.org/home](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fessexcoast.birdaware.org%2Fhome&data=02%7C01%7C%7C88625a3861db4bb0ac2508d73a9b7c00%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637042311783134538&sdata=kSx0MMgKWEAziFhizanQ%2FOpuDyi6nKHJ0wam6Xhx6z0%3D&reserved=0)

**Questions**

ASJ : how will the success be judged and verified? SP advised ongoing surveys to assess changes in bird populations would be undertaken although it was acknowledged that population changes could also be due to other factors. ASJ commented that he was pleased to see habitat creation included as a measure as that would be measurable. ASJ said that using the bird aware message was OK but that it would miss out on the importance of saltmarsh. He commented that there was saltmarsh loss due to recreational boating and SP advised that the use of wardens on jetskis is being considered to increase awareness amongst users.

MW asked about surveys in other periods than those already undertaken in Winter / Spring. SP advised that some summer surveys had been done on the Blackwater Estuary and that these had increased the zone of influence considerably.

SP advised that there would be a £132 charge for each new dwelling in each of the Local Authority areas within the Zone of Influence to cover a 20 year period and that this should be being collected already. Some authorities are collecting the funding and retaining until an accountable body is established, when the funding will all be centralised to ensure sufficient funding prior to the issuing of employment contracts.

It wasn’t entirely clear whether RAMS was deemed to be a planning or a habitat regulation matter and therefore whether the minimum of 10 houses should apply.

The RSPB had anticipated a further consultation on the RAMS strategy but note that the Strategy has already been published as a technical document. MN offered to be part of the RAMS Steering Group to ensure that RAMS works correctly from the very beginning as there are pressure points across the estuary at different states of the tide and he felt this needs to be captured in the strategy.

The disturbance monitoring undertaken on the Stour Orwell was considered to be an effective measure to demonstrate the success / effectiveness of any intervention.

SP explained that initial discussions had taken place with officers to begin to examine whether the Essex Coastal Forum could have a potential role for the future SW asked if there were any concerns to this proposal and none were forthcoming.

1. **Rochford Discovery 2020 Celebrations - Paula Chapman (PC), Rochford District Council**

Paula confirmed that she would forward slides after the meeting

Action : PC to forward slides after the meeting for onward distribution to ECF members.

RDC has Wallasea Island in their area and are currently looking to develop a green tourism offer to attract more visitors to the coast. The Discover 2020 festival will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the launch of HMS Beagle which Southampton University had discovered lay in the mud in Rochford District.

Working with RSPB, the intention is to hold an event in 30 – 31 May 2020 on Wallasea Island, but it was felt inappropriate to encourage visitors to location without facilities. The project is led by Angela Hutchings and will involve summer celebrations across the District, a new logo and branding. 2020 will also see the Mayflower 2020 festival promoted in Harwich so it would be beneficial to look to promote activities across Essex working in partnership with Visit Essex.

The community are being involved to propose a varied range of events, to attract different audiences. A website has been created to provide information and guidance for community groups for use in raising funding and organising events ([https://discover2020.co.uk](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdiscover2020.co.uk&data=02%7C01%7C%7C14de36fd556d48e5566208d7418dde3e%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637049949883720647&sdata=3aNFVnz8JWtLWuyd%2B4jbXzQNbtio51MwDuT2%2B%2Ffhs9Y%3D&reserved=0) ) . Volunteer guidance and a list of potential funding streams is being produced. An audience plan identifying target audiences and how to attract them would aim to result in increased spend and visitors to all parts of the District. The use of “Square readers” to take cashless payments was encouraged as fewer people carry cash.

ASJ had noted the concern re the need to balance increasing numbers of visitors and their impact on the natural environment and commented that it was necessary to find and maintain more habitat. He felt that Local Authorities should champion the replacement of higher level stewardship, which coming to an end shortly as there was currently no guarantee that other funding will be made available.

RL emphasised the importance of digital connectivity and commented that in Tollesbury speeds were approximately 1/10 of the speed needed. As a consequence businesses are moving from Tollesbury to Maldon due to connectivity issues. SW said this was a common problem which ECC is looking closely at.

Mark Platt commented that in Clacton, the sea defences were constructed without additional work being undertaken to encourage wider economic benefits for the area and that this was a missed opportunity. MJ replied that the EA were heavily engaged with that scheme, and that the link between investment and regeneration is always talked about.

PC advised that the Essex Association of Local Authorities had bid successfully for £4.5 million funding for the LFFN South Essex project (Local Full Fibre Network). The project would enable public sector buildings including Schools, GP surgeries, care homes and village halls to become hubs for rural and coastal villages to connect to, to achieve at least better broadband speeds. Anyone interested in finding out more about available funding should contact Superfast Essex.

1. **The House of Lords Environment report on Coastal Regeneration and Government response - Nicky Spurr (NS), ECC**

NS provided context re the House of Lords Committee and highlighted key issues and observations in their report “The Future of Seaside Towns” before outlining some of the key recommendations made by the Committee and the Government’s response. The full report can be accessed [here](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/regenerating-seaside-towns/news-parliament-2017/seaside-report-published/).

NS highlighted some key points of the Government’s Response to the report which can be accessed [here](https://www.parliament.uk/regenerating-seaside-towns). Government agreed with the report’s focus on listening to local priorities for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and agreed to consult widely on the design of the fund and welcomed the views of coastal communities (including local authorities and Coastal Community Teams) on how the UK Shared Prosperity Fund can deliver coastal regeneration.

1. **Environment Agency updates – John Lindsay (JL), Environment Agency**

JL advised that the Project Delivery Unit (PDU) had now been replaced by a more collaborative approach with a change in framework suppliers. The change had become necessary due to previous issues with procurement and getting contracts awarded. Risk Management Authorities can use the new framework approach as they had previously with the PDU. The EA could potentially help progress projects.

JL advised that at Stansgate sea wall, the EA had been working collaboratively with landowners. Landowner contractors were soon to move offsite, with EA moving on site soon for the completion of the new revetment and reinforcing of the embankment which was expected to be completed by Christmas. There was no slippage in programme, and the scheme was currently working to budget.

Re the scheme at Seawicks Caravan Park, the EA had been looking to work collaboratively with the caravan park to deliver a scheme with wider benefits but the caravan park had not agreed to this and hence a smaller project had resulted. The Outline Business Case had now been approved, ground investigation works had had to be put back – with the start date being delayed until next Sept and completion of works anticipated by the end of 2020.

At Clacton and Jaywick there was an issue with ageing defences. A strategic review was likely, with modelling work having been undertaken to take account of climate change - outputs were expected shortly. Beaches are remaining healthy and protection good with residual life in existing defences up to 30 years.

At Cockett Wick (near Jaywick Martello Tower) an issue with the contractor has put the scheme back by 2-3 months. Assessments were being undertaken re whether it was possible to build on top of the existing wall or whether a replacement wall was required to increase the standard of protection of the defence. There was a significant difference in costings for each scheme (approx. £1-1.5 million or £4.5m respectively). There would be insufficient funding in this Comprehensive Spending Review period to do the replacement option.

Collaborative work had been continuing with the Essex Coast Organisation where funding had been agreed to enable landowners to continue to undertake smaller works.

Mersea Harbour Protection Trust had been looking at construction of natural wave breaks using dredged material from Harwich. The proposal had been re-worked and resubmitted with a total cost of £350 000 for the scheme.

MJ provided an update re the national SMP refresh to the 20 SMPs which had been produced in 2010. A contract had been let jointly to Jacobs (ex Halcrow) and Royal Haskoning for completion over the next 12-18 months, to update the SMPs to take account of revised climate change predictions, and other changes such as the Partnership Funding approach.

The National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management draft strategy consultation started nearly 2 months ago (closing date of 4th July) and had drawn a high degree of media interest. Workshops had been held with RFCCs to help individuals / groups develop their responses. The intention to lay a finalised plan before Parliament in the Autumn although there was flexibility over this.

1. **England Coast Path – James Lamb (JLa), Natural England (NE)**

An update re the status of the 9 stretches of the England Coast Path in Essex was provided with up to date information available on the following link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-in-essex>). There have been many staff changes within the local Coast Path team and training requirements for new staff have also impacted on delivery.

NE were considering the approach needed following the “People over Wind” ruling as a full Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) was now needed for all stretches. A national unit has been set up by NE to undertake the work and a new delivery timetable agreed with Defra. The delivery programme has been delayed although the majority of prior alignments are not thought to need significant (if any) changes. A number of stretches have been published and submitted for Secretary of State approval. These will need to be re-visited and an HRA carried out - NE are not anticipating any changes to alignment. These HRAs will be considered as quickly as possible after the other routes have been progressed.

The Maldon to Salcott stretch has already been signed off by the Secretary of State and NE are waiting for ECC to submit a funding application for the costs of the establishment works once Essex Highways has clarified what’s required to get the path up to national trail standards. There is Government commitment for funding of the establishment works moving forward.

ASJ was concerned that weaknesses associated with low points in some of the seawalls were not being addressed as part of the Coast Path work and that some sections of path were not of a satisfactory standard. JLa responded that where defects had been identified by NE / Essex Highways, then these would be included in the costed proposal for the establishment grant. ASJ asked whether it is possible to add sites to the list if it doesn’t include all points which need work. JLa explained that the defect would need to be fairly significant and also highlighted that some responsibilities rest with Highways Authority due to their existing responsibilities for existing public rights of way. ASJ was concerned that NE will consider the defects to be too small to be picked up and that there wasn’t the required synergy between the 3 organisations to achieve the result that’s needed. He stressed that it’s important to ensure the surface was suitable for visitors coming to area, and also consider flood defence implications. JL commented that if there is a defect in the seawall that the EA would take action, but it was not EA responsibility to undertake improvements associated with the Coast Path per se. ASJ advised that there were 2 locations in Tollesbury where there was ‘slop’ on the surface which could result in a weakness with regards to potential overtopping. It can be difficult to determine responsibility. Regarding ongoing maintenance, the Highways Authority will have money available to them and ASJ felt it should be up to them together with landowners to decide where best to spend. Landowners have contributed £10 000s (through the General Drainage Charge) to defences which obviously protect their land, but also can protect other infrastructure, but now the trail will be encouraging greater use. ASJ stressed the importance of dealing with small problems effectively before they become bigger.

Steve Plumb commented that Thurrock and Essex Highways Authorities had met a year ago, and questioned whether there will be further engagement between the 2 authorities.  Thurrock were involved with several Development Consent Order applications at the moment and which could affect delivery of the preferred route and could be a resourcing issue.

1. **Items to be noted**

Essex Path to Prosperity - NS

Meetings had taken place with coastal local authorities to identify features / amenities to include on the maps which would be installed along the coast. Local authority reps had been asked to comment on the suitability of sites for map installation as well as inputting re the features which should be included. Local Authorities were also being asked to advise re any need for planning permission in their area.

A pilot weekend hopper bus service would operate during the summer months of 2020, and scoping of routes was continuing. It was highlighted that the hopper couldn’t compete with existing commercial bus services and hence possible that not every local authority area would see a hopper service in their area.

The recruitment process was continuing for Project Manager and a Liaison Officer.

1. **Any Other Business**

Roger Lankester commented on the latest computer generated predictions for sea level rise where scientists had predicted there’d be a rise in sea level of 2m. The Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) policies for Old Hall Marshes and Tollesbury Wick of managed realignment for Epoch 3. Given predictions for sea level rise, RL felt these sites unlikely to create saltmarsh unless levels raised sufficiently (might not be feasible as it require approx. 6m m3 of material). If managed realignment sites weren’t progressed, a lack of maintenance could result in the loss of seawall over time affecting approx. 250 berth swinging moorings and other assets in Tollesbury. Both sites provide circular routes for Coast Path and can see high demand as they can be walked in 0.5 – 1 day. Essex Grazing Marsh project states that Historic Essex are concerned that although acknowledging engagement was undertaken at the time of SMP production, the most significant coastal grazing marsh has been chosen for potential managed realignment. Whilst some of the natural environment features might be able to be replaced over time, the value of the land at Old Hall and Tollesbury Wisk can’t be replaced and represents 1 of the top 12 historic grazing marshes in the UK. He added that Management Unit F would require recording at the site and this could cause the policy to revert to hold the line. RL feels it’s essential that the SMP policy is amended for Epoch 3 to enable discussions to determine appropriate measures.

RL implored EA colleagues to think again during the review, and as has been done for Jaywick suggested that a hold the line policy would be most appropriate. He requested that at the next meeting of the ECF there should be a presentation regarding the importance of Essex Historic Grazing Marshes.

SW responded that the case put by RL had been heard and that he would consider the consider suggestion for Grazing Marsh presentation.

**Action SW : to consider a presentation regarding the value of Grazing Marshes for the next ECF meeting.**

It was agreed that updates from the Coastal Community Teams would be forwarded with minutes.

KD advised that the EA had resources in place to work with Councils to understand what’s meant by Riverside Strategy Approach.