

Bawdsey Coastal Partnership

Annual General Meeting 2017, Bawdsey Village Hall, 1030 Saturday February 11 2017

Present: In addition to the directors of BCP, Charles Beardall (EA), Gareth Dalglish (NE), Andy Smith, Bill Parker (SCDC) plus about 50 members of the public. A list is available.

Chair: Brian Johnson, Chair of Bawdsey Parish Council

Apologies: Tim Green, Andrew Rouse, Mark Johnson,

Approval of Minutes of AGM 2016: approved

Election of Chair: Nick Crick was duly nominated and seconded, and there being no other candidate, elected.

Similarly elected were: Anne Page, Vice Chair; Christopher Langley, Treasurer; Tim Green, Andrew Rouse, Bill Vaudrey, Executive Committee members.

Constitution: minor amendments were presented and approved.

Accounts: Christopher Langley reported that the bank balance had increased from £1,790 at last year end, to £4,330 now, with more funds due.

The accounts were shown and approved.

Any Other Business: *Paul Hayden* agreed to send through material explaining how to effect the transformation of a Company Limited by Guarantee, into a Community Interest Company. It was felt by all that this would be a positive move.

Andy Smith recommended discussion with *Paul Wood*, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, to assist with creating the CIC.

The business meeting ended.

It was followed by an address from **Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal, and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities***.

First, Nick Crick thanked the meeting for electing him to the Chair, and thanked his predecessor, Tim Green, for his diligence over the previous two years, ensuring that the Partnership was strongly grounded and in good shape to tackle the challenges ahead.

He welcomed the 50 or so members of the public attending; and notably the Minister; Paul Hayden, Chair of the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee; Cllr Andy Smith and Bill Parker from Suffolk Coastal District Council; and Charles Beardall of the Environment Agency.

He outlined the history and present activities of the Partnership, noting East Lane Point and Bawdsey Cliffs as the main present worries.

He said engineering consultants were being retained by the BCP to suggest options for a long-term sustainable solution at East Lane, and to assist with the review of the Shoreline Management Plan.

He thanked the EA and Suffolk Coastal DC for seed corn funding, commissioning important studies and for continuing emergency works, notably at East Lane; but he was anxious about dependence on those agencies, and about their own stretched finances.

He pointed out that the Economic Study undertaken by the BCP detailed the importance of historic monuments to local tourism, and also the crucial role played by agriculture. He reminded the audience that the gift of land to enable development to fund sea defences at East Lane had been a pioneering project nationally. It had made possible contributory public funding which had kept the area safe in recent years.

When engineering solutions had been devised and costed, Mr Crick wanted the Partnership to be able to discuss them in detail with the Minister and her relevant colleagues.

Therese Coffey followed:

She said seven years as MP for Suffolk Coastal had been the perfect apprenticeship for her present ministerial duties*. She had flood AND drought in her brief, and indeed Suffolk Coastal was presently under the national average for rainfall.

She urged the Partnership to talk to her Ministerial colleagues when we were ready with plans, as she could not take decisions where her own constituency was involved. But she could lobby on its behalf.

She said the new **six year budgeting agreement** with Treasury made planning ahead considerably easier and more efficient. Budgets could now be carried forward into the next financial year. The Department was now trying to plan for 2021—26, not just for flood and coastal defence, but for roads and rail infrastructure as well.

She felt the Environment Agency was as responsive to local needs as it had ever been, but its budgets were required for schemes all over the country and especially in the North, following the major floods in Cumbria and Yorkshire. They were aiming for better preparation and focus on local flood action plans.

The EA had developed temporary flood barriers for rapid deployment.

She had been told that **East Lane defences** could cost £8m. The numbers of homes affected was still the main criterion for gaining Treasury funds for defences, as they did not accept that agricultural land had equivalent value.

The main benefit of recent times was the agreement that EA could join in Partnership funded schemes, rather than relying on 100 per cent Government grant or nothing. Now any project with a cost/benefit ratio greater than one could qualify for some EA funding.

Furthermore, where businesses invested in flood defences, they now qualified for **tax relief**.

The Minister did not want to prejudge the **Shoreline Management Plan Review**, but knew that the Suffolk Coastal Forum, in coming to its decisions, would be responsive to local views.

She announced an imminent Green Paper on the Environment, which would be the culmination of work towards a national plan. She hoped it would provoke a big discussion about **natural capital** as a factor in decision-making.

The Government was determined on cleaner air and water, and a higher quality environment

generally.

Brexit would not involve withdrawal from all EU directives to protect the environment. The Great Repeal Bill would be designed only to repeal the Act which joined the UK to the EU. All directives and agreements would remain in place as UK law. Some new primary legislation might be needed for fisheries and agricultural support.

Changes would occur in the following parliament, as EU directives were examined one by one, with repeal unlikely, and strengthening probable in many cases. Where the EU had been prescriptive in early days, outcomes-based solutions were now more relevant.

Pioneer rural areas might be developed as some EU regulations were improved and made more appropriate.

Carbon capture was a current enthusiasm for DEFRA, which was keen to promote new peat and salt marsh zones. There was money presently available for carbon capture schemes, which were also deemed good as flood protection. Money was also available for contributions towards the 300,000 new houses target, especially where innovation was involved. Natural flood defences were encouraged.

In discussion the following points were raised:

Greg Guthrie suggested that integrated coastal management rather than flood risk assessment might help avoid the £130m of potential damage if East Lane were to flood.

TC said the SMP was very important as not all the coast could be defended. The authorities should level with people about moving away from the coast where the risks were great.

Cllr Smith said local solutions were needed. Adaptation should assist communities, this had been pioneered in Suffolk Coastal. Local priorities were debated and settled at the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee level.

Alan Douglas said sheep were now grazing on previous marshes, and he struggled with the concept of managed retreat, or carbon capture there. More than houses would be lost if the land were given up to the sea.

TC said she was so far not succeeding in gaining funds to turn salt marsh into carbon capture areas, like peat bogs.

Mrs Foster gained the understanding that natural capital meant no diesel cars, nor wet wood burning.

The proposed Green Paper on the Environment would show how Government policy was developing over the next year, towards a 25 year Environment Plan.

Will Richards was told that groynes were the right kind of defence in the right kind of place - horses for courses.

Ann Toettcher said planners should be more sympathetic to enabling development. TC said the Government was simplifying the planning approach for councils, while protecting policies for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or woodland. It was for local officials and elected people to clear blockages.

Cllr Smith said SCDC was used to the idea of enabling development having pioneered it.

Mr Hayden reminded the audience about seed corn funding which was available from the RFCC which was also a “dating agency” to match partners in projects.

A handwritten signature in green ink, consisting of a large, stylized letter 'A' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Chairman

*** Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities**

Responsibilities include:

- natural environment, including biodiversity, the marine environment, and international wildlife trafficking
- rural life opportunities, covering rural childcare, education and skills, and health
- floods, water and waterways
- air quality
- resource and environment management