

Cabinet

Report Title:	Alde and Ore Estuary Plan
Meeting Date:	22 March 2016
Lead Councillor(s):	Councillor Matthew Hicks, Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection
Local Councillor(s):	Councillor Richard Smith MVO and Councillor Andrew Reid
Director:	Geoff Dobson, Director of Resource Management
Assistant Director or Head of Service:	Matt Hullis, Head of Environment Strategy
Author:	Jane Burch, Flood and Coast Policy Manager, 01473 264782

Brief summary of report

1. The community around the Alde and Ore estuary, working with statutory agencies, has produced a plan for the long term management of the estuary, primarily focussed on flood management. The plan has undergone public consultation and a sustainability appraisal. In the near future Suffolk Coastal District Council will be asked to endorse the Alde and Ore Estuary Plan (the plan) ensuring it becomes a material consideration in planning decisions and informs other decisions relevant to the area. Both cabinet and Suffolk Coastal District Council endorsed an equivalent plan for the Deben Estuary in March 2015. This plan has a similar, non-statutory, status, and is complementary to, the Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan which deals with the coastline outside of the estuaries, and was endorsed by the Council in 2010.

What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. To endorse the Alde and Ore Estuary Plan (Appendix A) and make reference to it when making any relevant decisions in the plan area. |
|--|

Reason for recommendation

3. The community around the Alde and Ore estuary, working with the Environment Agency and other statutory bodies, has produced a plan for the long term management of the estuary. It has undergone public consultation and a sustainability appraisal. Suffolk Coastal District Council's Cabinet will be asked to endorse the Plan, if agreed this will enable it to become a material consideration in the planning process. Suffolk County Council has a number of responsibilities and decision making powers that have the potential to impact on the aims and objectives of the Plan. Cabinet is being asked to endorse the Plan, to ensure any future decisions relevant to the plan take into account the policies and actions generated by the estuary stakeholders.

What are the key issues to consider?

4. Whether the plan is compatible with the aspirations of the council. The plan considers the economy, environment and leisure activities that the estuary supports and primarily focusses on managing the risks posed by flooding.
5. The plan is a non-statutory plan that will inform decisions on planning and other aspects of management. The area is vulnerable to natural processes that potentially result in changes to the landscape and environment. The plan assesses the risks associated with the evolution of the area and provides a sustainable framework to address these risks for people, the developed, historic and natural environment, over time.
6. The plan has emerged over time, beginning with a three year project, Alde and Ore Futures (published in 2010), which delivered an overwhelming ambition among local people for an estuary wide plan to sustain the current economic, environmental and community life as it now is, for as long as that is feasible, by maintaining the existing shape of the estuary.
7. The plan has developed to identify a strategy to maintain the integrity of the area, the landscape and all that this supports, with new solutions for creating more resilient flood defences throughout the estuary. River walls currently protect large areas of land adjacent to the estuary and a new 'resilience' approach, to ensure these walls can resist breaching even if overtopped, is considered as the preferred management approach for most parts of the area in the medium term (i.e. next 20-50 years). This approach is not currently captured in any recognised plans.
8. Historically government funded the maintenance and improvement of flood defences, but there is now an expectation that local beneficiaries should contribute to this flood risk management. Alongside landowners undertaking greater responsibility for defences that protect their own land, the concept of 'enabling development' has been put forward in the plan as one way the necessary flood protection work in the Alde and Ore estuary may be funded.
9. Flood risk management is a priority for the Council. A number of communities and environments along the estuary will be increasingly vulnerable to natural processes and will see losses and changes. The implementation of the plan may affect public access, minor roads, the local economy and the level of flood risk. The plan has engaged the relevant stakeholders to address these difficult issues.
10. The Alde and Ore estuary has a number of European and national environmental designations and lies within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. At this time it is difficult to predict the impacts of climate change and the resilience approach proposed within the Plan. Thus the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership has agreed to work with the Environment Agency and Natural England to monitor changes to the estuary environment and review the plan approach in the light of any adverse effects to protected areas and species.
11. An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the Council is not the lead organisation responsible for the content of the strategy.

What are the resource and risk implications?

12. The delivery of the plan will require the co-operation of statutory agencies and the local community; it will also require a shared approach to funding. As the plan reflects the Council's current activities in the area, no additional resources are required, but a more flexible use of existing resources may be desirable in order to make best use of all available funding.
13. There is a reputational risk with the local community and Suffolk Coastal District Council if the Council chooses not to support the plan. The previous endorsement of the equivalent Deben Estuary Plan means that a decision not to support the plan will impact on the constructive work being taken forward with this community and our partner organisations.

What are the timescales associated with this decision?

14. The Anglian Eastern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee will be asked to endorse the Plan in April and Suffolk Coastal District Council in May 2016. It is desirable, although not essential, that the Council endorses the plan as soon as possible so it can be utilised in decision making.

Alternative options

15. The Council could decide not to endorse the plan, suggest further changes or postpone its endorsement.

Who will be affected by this decision?

16. All those living, working or visiting the area on, alongside or on the hinterland of the Alde and Ore Estuary will be affected by the implementation of the plan.

Main body of report

17. The Alde and Ore Estuary Plan (Appendix A) is largely self-explanatory.
18. The area covered by the Plan can be seen outlined in red on the map (Fig 1). The blue shading on the map illustrates those areas at risk of flooding.
19. Over the last ten years proposals for managing flood risk in the Alde and Ore Estuary failed to command the confidence of the community. Among wide ranging recommendations by statutory agencies were proposals for letting some river defences fail in the near future or be re-aligned. This was viewed by the community as having an adverse effect on the local economy, leisure activities and the special environmental characteristics of this unique area. A clear outcome of the Alde and Ore Futures community consultation was an overwhelming ambition among local people for an estuary-wide plan to sustain the current economic, environmental and community life as it now is, for as long as that is feasible, by maintaining the existing shape of the estuary.
20. The response to the Alde and Ore Futures consultation by both the government agencies and the local community working together was the establishment of the Alde and Ore Estuary Partnership (AOEP). This group has prepared this Plan to keep the integrity of the area, the landscape and all that this supports, with new solutions for creating more effective flood defences throughout the estuary. A 'resilience' approach, to ensure river walls can resist breaching even if overtopped, is considered as the preferred management approach for the majority of the river walls in the medium term (i.e. next 20-50 years). This is not currently captured in any recognised plans.

21. In essence the plan will seek to achieve the protection of the local economy, including agriculture (and the fresh water needed for irrigation), tourism and leisure pursuits, housing and the unique environment including its flora and fauna for the next 20-30 years.
22. The plan is a new approach to estuary management planning (building on the very successful Deben Estuary Plan). It extends the Environment Agency's former process of only addressing flood risk management within a very restrictive cost-benefit formula focussing on a number of properties at risk. The plan sets out not only how flood risk can be managed, but also how the interrelated benefits, challenges and threats to the estuary and hinterland relate to the sustainability of the wider area and the true value of what is protected by river walls.
23. It adopts an inclusive approach, in line with the Core Strategy of the Suffolk Coastal District Council District Plan 2013, specifically the chapter, "The Coastal Zone", commencing at paragraph 4.102, and Policy SP30 on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, recognising that the estuary area must be seen as a whole.
24. The plan acknowledges statutory requirements and positions under the umbrella of existing policy, but allows local needs and aspirations to influence the decision making process. It was built around the premise of an integrated approach to managing the area - involving recognition of the need to reconcile the continued wellbeing of the river systems, the interests of the communities for whom it has a core value and the ecological integrity of a unique estuarine environment. No single aspect can be considered in isolation and any separate management decision in a single area may have ramifications across the entire complex.
25. The plan was put together by the AOEP with the support of the Environment Agency, who hold statutory responsibility for flood defence; Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, who carry responsibility for the management of the AONB and other agencies, including both Suffolk County and Suffolk Coastal District Councils, Natural England, East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board, National Farmers' Union, the Marine Management Organisation, National Trust and RSPB.
26. Community involvement and consultation has informed the plan's development over the past four years. The local community, including Parish Councils, landowners, businesses, local organisations and wildlife organisations, have welcomed the opportunity to put forward their aspirations and requirements, but have equally recognised their roles and responsibilities in the delivery of the Plan.
27. A Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Water Framework Directive assessment of the Plan have been undertaken and concluded that the plan is generally robust, is expected to have a largely neutral or positive effect and meets statutory requirements. However, the uncertainty associated with predicting the extent of sea level rise and climate change means there is a commitment to a monitoring programme and regular review of the plan to ensure continued compliance with environmental legislation.

28. The plan will be supported by an Action Plan, including mitigation measures linked with the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA). Its implementation will be co-ordinated and monitored by the AOEP and overseen (as with the delivery of the Shoreline Management Plan) by the Suffolk Coast Forum and relevant statutory bodies. This monitoring will also inform the HRA requirements for the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan documents.

Sources of further information

- a) Information about the work of the Alde & Ore Estuary Partnership, including details of the plan and associated documents available on www.aoep.co.uk
- b) Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan 7 - www.suffolksmp2.org.uk/
- c) Deben Estuary Pan - www.debenestuarypartnership.co.uk

Alde Ore Estuary Plan

Alde & Ore Estuary Plan, Appendices, Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulation Assessment and Water Framework Directive Assessment, on: <http://aoep.co.uk/index.php/estuary-plan/>.

Fig 1: Plan boundary (red line); areas at flood risk (blue)

