

RSPB Response to concerns raised at the recent CCT Meeting

The RSPB understands that there have been continuing discussions and misunderstandings regarding the flood protection functionality of the Wallasea scheme and of the redesigned Cells 2 and 4 particularly. In response we can only really seek to reaffirm and summarise what has been set out (very often) within the main planning and assessment documents (Environmental Statements, Planning Statements and Flood Risk Assessments) that have been produced for this project over the last 10 years. These documents have consistently explained and verified the flood protection objectives and value of the scheme throughout all its design iterations. These conclusions have been accepted by all the key regulatory bodies.

The coastal habitat creation works at Wallasea Island have been a major undertaking benefiting from substantial (several £10s millions) investment by initially Defra and then the RSPB working with Crossrail and the Environment Agency. The quality of this work has been recognised nationally and internationally. It is hoped that the local benefit of this work will be acknowledged, in so far as 7 km (around 4.5 km for the original length of the Allfleet's Marsh and 2.6km for the original length of Jubilee Marsh [Cell 1]) of lower quality seawall has been removed from primary flood defence, reducing the risk and consequence of an unmanaged breach on Wallasea Island. Furthermore the Environment Agency will continue with their maintenance responsibility for the southern seawall (around 3km), with maintenance work planned in 2018.

As a result of all these works, the flood risk to the island has been sustainably reduced as has the risk of substantial damage to the estuary causing long-term impacts to adjacent landowners' properties as a result.

Regarding the flood risk implications and benefits of the new Cell 2 and 4 design specifically; these were considered in the recent suite of planning documents and in a bespoke supplementary submission that was provided to address CHA concerns (and others) and was explained in Section 8 of the Planning Statement that accompanied the latest Section 73 application.

Once again we would highlight that the value of the Wallasea scheme has been to address the risks that existed to the wider estuary from an unmanaged and unmaintained seawall breach event on the island. It might be difficult for some stakeholders to recognise after the last decade of progress, that the island was a flat low landform surrounded by around 11 km of seawall with no commitment for that wall to be maintained. The amount of work done on this site to address this unmanaged flood risk has been extraordinary. Also, all the Wallasea design iterations achieve this core objective whether that is from a managed realignment approach (which allows the island to be flooded in controlled manner by limited tidal volumes and then allows for sediment accretion to further reduce tidal exchanges over time) or from the new design for the remaining Cells 2 and 4 (which represents an alternative mechanism for controlling tidal exchange with the estuary while also facilitating gradual sediment accretion on the island). To help further clarify this issue again, we have answered some of the key points raised below:

- **What will happen now in River Roach during an exceptional high tide?** Under extreme events much of the island is protected by the new walls backing the Allfleet's Marsh and Cell 1 Jubilee Marsh. In the future when the scheme is completed, and depending entirely on the water levels reached, the walls fronting Cells 2 and 4 are likely to overtop. In this situation, tidal water will spill into the site and disperse through the Cell 2 and 4 borrow dyke and across the network of ditches and dykes that are now threaded throughout the Cell 5 area and the open un-bunded

marshes of Cell 2. The waters that flood back into the estuary will be released in a controlled manner so that there is a much reduced likelihood of an unmanaged breach of the primary seawall happening - thus avoiding significant damage by ebbing tides on the River Roach. As the Cell 2 and 4 walls would be overtopped on such an extreme tide many other walls around the estuary would also be overtopped and hinterland areas flooded. These other hinterland areas would have been flooded under the existing situation and also if a managed realignment scheme had been introduced to Cells 2 and 4. The new design, therefore, does not change this situation except in so far as providing a minor/negligible (probably undetectable in the real world) benefit because it will provide a degree of flood storage function (i.e. taking some of the water out of the estuary at the critical peak of the tide) in a way that would not have happened if a managed realignment scheme had been implemented in Cells 2 and 4. Also there will be RSPB site managers in place that will be able, should a breach happen or overtopping cause significant damage, to enact immediate and appropriate post-event restorative actions in close cooperation with the Environment Agency.

- **The difference between Frampton and Wallasea is that Frampton has a secondary sea wall and Wallasea will now not.** The RSPB developed new habitats on former arable farmland behind the primary seawall sea defence within a very large area, including neighbouring arable land. This arable land does have a very old former seawall which to some extent could serve as a secondary sea defence. However at Wallasea the need for provision of a new counterwall was not supported by the Flood Risk Assessment and this conclusion is supported by both the Environment Agency and Essex County Council.
- **Where does that leave Wallasea Island and surrounding communities down the River Roach.** The surrounding communities are massively benefitting by the scheme having been done. This is both because they are now not at risk of a future unmanaged flood event across Wallasea Island that would have caused substantial erosion and long-term change to the estuary but also because they have an accessible wetland of international status in the region that is expected to bring a socio-economic boost to the area. Those owning land alongside the estuary will still of course be vulnerable to occasional hinterland flooding on big tides as they were before the Wallasea scheme (a problem which it is not RSPB's duty to resolve any more than any other landowner(s) along the estuary, and the RSPB has arguably made a larger contribution than any other local landowner).
- **What is the long term effect on the area, of RSPB changing their flood works, as now primary defence is EA sea wall.** It is highly beneficial, as has been explained fulsomely in the planning documents and again above. In addition to all of the above issues, the Environment Agency is now able to carry out coastal defence works in other parts of the region because the habitat created by the Wallasea scheme (Jubilee Marsh) can be used to offset habitat losses arising from such defences elsewhere.

RSPB (with input from ABPmer) 31 May 2018