

Suffolk Coast Forum

Background & Terms of Reference

The content of this paper was discussed and agreed at the first Suffolk Coast Forum meeting held on 17 February 2012. It will be reviewed on an annual basis.

1. Background

Coastal governance “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented” was identified from an early stage in the development of Suffolk Coast Futures as being a fundamental strand of the work of the group.

A preparatory paper was discussed at the Suffolk Coast Futures Executive Group meeting in September 2009 as an initial think piece about this issue. Since then there have been a number of developments that affect or impact this issue including:

- The outcomes from the Pitt review are embodied in Flood and Water Management Act. This gives the Environment Agency (EA) a strategic role to overview all flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM). It also designated the County Council as Lead Local Flood Authority.
- Greater awareness of the concept of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and recognition of its value at both the national (e.g. National Planning Policy Framework) and locally (e.g. Core Strategies) leading to the integration of planning and coast protection issues in Suffolk.
- Government policy on localism, community planning and the big society
- The creation and new remit of a the Marine Management Organisation
- The Total Environment work being undertaken on a rationalisation of processes with Defra and better use of all coastal resources within local authorities and the Defra family.
- The developing ideas and local delivery in particular through Alde and Ore Futures, Deben Estuary Partnership, Stour and Orwell Estuary Management Group, Blyth Estuary Group and Pathfinder.
- New funding regimes especially in regard to flood and coastal erosion risk management.

This 'Governance' suggestion has undergone a number of iterations and has been shared with the proposed new partnership members, who agreed to the formation of a new Suffolk Coast Forum.

2. Principles of Governance

The evolving thinking over the past two years on coastal governance has lead to the identification of the following principles:

- Keep it simple and reduce / remove duplication of effort.
- Build on existing structures and resources, evolve to be 'fit for purpose'
- To be open and transparent
- Local representation is fundamental
- Clearly delineated pathways for individuals / organisations to have an input into the decision making process
- There needs to be democratic input into a binding decision making process

- Governance needs to show clear relationships between different geographical scales / hierarchical levels
- The entire Suffolk coast should be covered and integrated with adjacent local and regional structures

3. Scope of Coastal Governance

The scope of coastal governance within Suffolk is to ensure flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) and closely associated issues (e.g. environment, access, land use, etc) are delivered within a wider Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) context.

Other issues that are not directly FCERM related (e.g. broadband, local housing) will be 'sign posted' to their own governance mechanisms.

4. Governance and Influence

4 tiers of **governance** can be identified, having direct powers to affect activities on the Suffolk coast. In addition there are a number of bodies which have influence on Suffolk's coastal management. These tiers can be described below and are expanded upon the in following section:-

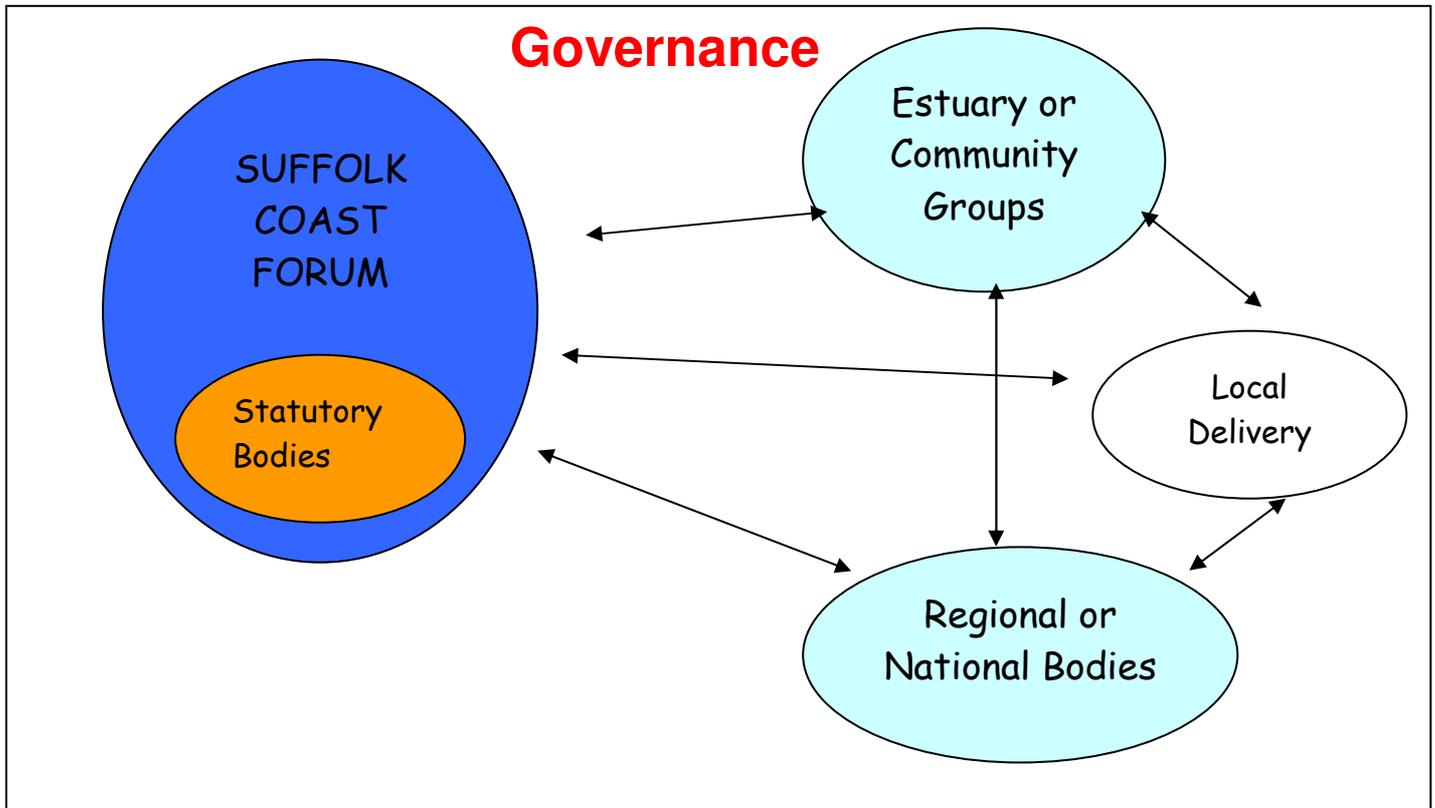
- Community Based Projects – Currently local groups are working with local authorities, EA, NE, MMO, etc and the AONB estuary officer to resolve specific issues and influencing organisational policy on an ad-hoc project basis. The learning from these projects is crucial to ensuring a co-ordinated and efficient way of partnership working.
- Local Area (Estuary or Community Groups) – Based on a geographic area (e.g. estuaries and / or specific lengths of open coasts) smaller than a district covering a number of parishes and potentially crossing district / county boundaries. These areas are delineated by physical attributes and often have a common feature which brings them together. Local areas have community aspirations and organisation, but until now had only informal links into the wider management of the coast
- Suffolk Coast Forum – Within the county of Suffolk, building on the Suffolk Coast Futures pilot but enhanced to provide a more cohesive, comprehensive and representative to meet the needs of the future of the coast. Membership will include links to other levels of governance and influence.
- The Forum will include partners with statutory powers and duties (e.g. local authorities, EA, MMO, NE) as well as community groups.
- Regional / National – Wider than just Suffolk but where Suffolk has a voice but is not the only one. There are a number of specific organisations where a strong consistent voice is important as they have a direct and influencing role into government and its departments or have access to funding streams.

The structure can be represented diagrammatically as below. This illustrates that governance is not a linear hierarchical structure and that all tiers are linked and important. However, certain bodies have specific and statutory duties/powers and resources, which has a direct bearing on some aspects of decision making.

Following the 'total environment' principles of simplifying processes and making best use of all available resources, the Suffolk Coast Forum will need to discuss where statutory permissions can

be simplified and streamlined and how decision making can best be devolved to the most local level.

Illustration of Governance of FCERM in Suffolk:



Local Area

The local area is delineated by physical / geographical attributes and has a common feature which focuses the activity (e.g. an estuary). There are a number of geographically specific organisations set up to influence / manage their local environment.

These break into two areas - estuaries and open coast.

Estuaries:

This recommendation builds on the 4 existing estuary partnerships / management groups and helps develop more structured links with the wider Suffolk Coast Forum.

The area and scope of the estuary groups is quite distinct and they have different attributes (e.g. Scheme of Management for Stour and Orwell). However, their initial focus is generally the FCERM strategy and there are similarities between estuaries. FCERM is the common link and generally a high priority. Administrative and project delivery support is largely provided by the Suffolk Estuaries Officer based at the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB Unit.

Open Coast:

The Open Coast is less distinct and the basis of FCERM is largely defined by the SMPs. Existing partnership organisations (e.g. Landguard Peninsula Partnership, Thorpeness residents group) and areas where there is no formal representation will be represented by Suffolk Coast Against Retreat (SCAR).

The Forum will also have two 'open chairs' at the table to enable these and other relevant groups to become involved at an appropriate and probably time limited period.

The Forum Chairman will invite others to take these open chairs based on agenda items or requests to bring specific topics to the Forum.

The result of Estuary/Coastal groups being equal partners in the Suffolk Coast Forum should be:

- Increased credibility and wider influence locally and nationally
- Greater local input into determination of priorities
- Extend local involvement in decision making
- Pioneer ideas and share learning with other partners
- Improved links to and influence the delivery of Suffolk, regional and national initiatives
- Raise and resolve issues that affect the individual local areas
- Share expertise and resources to achieve joint objectives
- Improve communication between local areas
- Improved understanding of local issues by authorities and agencies

It is for the Local Groups to determine their own scope and terms of reference dependent on local needs and capacity. These may include:

- Provide leadership in a local area
- Create and monitor the delivery of a local / estuary plans
- Close working with EA on flood defence works around the estuary
- Support in seeking additional funding locally where required.
- Initiate and support small scale projects.
- Provide a voice and champion for the local area.
- A conduit between local people and local authorities and agencies.
- Aim to take an holistic ICZM approach to the future of their area

Membership of local Groups should reflect their local area, these should include but not limited to:

- Town / Parish and District Councillors
- Land owners
- Environmental bodies
- Local Associations
- Recreation bodies
- Businesses

Input from the Agencies and Local Authorities will be agreed on a local basis.

5. The Suffolk Coast Forum – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Overall aim:

To take a partnership approach to flood and coastal erosion risk management on the coast and estuaries and closely related issues¹ in the context of an ICZM approach

Specifically to:

Encourage and involve

- Encourage 'bottom up' local governance arrangements appropriate to each Local Area to integrate with a wider Suffolk partnership.
- Deliver better FCERM with local communities than by managing issues individually

¹ Issues directly related to FCERM include environment, landscape, land use, access and recreation, both on land and water. It excludes issues such as broadband, housing, transport.

- Smooth and simplify the decision making pathways on FCERM issues
- Decision making should, where possible, be both simplified and made at the lowest '*de minimus*' level. If statute allows, decisions should be transferred to or implemented flexibly to suit specific local situations.
- Seek to maximise FCERM funding opportunities through a wider range of development and sources.
- Seek to make best use of all available local resources to deliver FCERM in Suffolk.
- Inform and influence relevant plan and decision making processes of all relevant bodies.

Monitor, coordinate and collaborate

- Strategic overviews to be retained by competent authorities to ensure that a coherent, balanced and legally compliant approach is adopted.
- Ensure that FCERM and directly linked plans (SMPs, estuary plans, marine plans, local spatial plans, AONB plans, coastal access, Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, etc) are co-ordinated and managed in the spirit of ICZM, ensuring local activities are complementary and duplication reduced.
- Monitor actions / activities along the coast and estuaries providing support / impetus to help resolve outstanding issues.
- Support the delivery and monitoring of Shoreline Management Plans
- Integrated and mainstreamed into existing and developing institutions and processes including the development of community based planning.
- Co-ordinate the most effective use of scarce resources across its membership.

Scrutinise, learn and share

- Scrutinise new legislation, co-ordinate responses and views on a county wide perspective and actively seek to promote the Suffolk coast to Regional / national bodies (see below)
- Share information and promote good practice and become a recognised authority on coastal issues.
- Liaise with Suffolk Flood Risk Management Partnership to co-ordinate and eliminate duplication to all aspects of FCERM and to inform members of the RFCC on Suffolk's inland and coastal priorities.
- A positive ICZM approach is to be taken by all parties utilising the best of the learning from elsewhere.
- Share information on an ongoing basis amongst the group and externally. Make use of wider expertise and contacts where available to inform the partnership.

Membership

Covers a range of local, Suffolk, regional and national decision making and influential bodies. Membership and Terms of Reference of the Group will be reviewed annually at the first meeting of the calendar year.

The membership of the Suffolk Coast Forum will be:

- Local authority portfolio holders (or agreed substitute) and officers from Suffolk County, Suffolk Coastal District, Waveney District, Ipswich Borough and Babergh District Councils
- Senior officers from EA, NE, MMO
- AONB Manager
- A representative from each of the 4 Estuary Partnerships (DEP, AOEP, BEG, S&O EMG)
- Internal Drainage Board representative
- SCAR
- Chairman of the Anglian Eastern RFCC
- 2 'open chairs'

It is hoped that organisations will try to have regular attendees at the meetings, but it is accepted that substitutes will be needed at times to ensure all organisations are represented at all meetings.

Other interested parties (such as RSPB, NT, Crown Estates, CLA, EH, IFCA, coastal groups, Suffolk Estuaries officer) can request to be on the circulation list for papers and information and are invited to observe the meeting and put forward relevant topics for discussion at future meetings.

These observers may be invited to speak at the meetings at the discretion of the Chairman – and maybe invited to utilise the 'open chairs' as relevant to agenda items. Those making regular and valuable contributions will be considered for Forum membership when this is reviewed.

There are many key links to be made within organisations – i.e. with other departments within local authorities (e.g. spatial planning, rights of way) and the EA whose activities have a direct bearing on coastal management. Members of the Forum will ensure they are acting as a conduit for relevant exchange of information and ideas.

Operation of the Forum

- The basis of the Forum will be a partnership approach and each organisation will have an equal voice regardless of funding issues. Decisions will generally be reached by consensus. Otherwise each partner organisation will have one vote.
- There will be Elected Member (i.e. Councillor) chairman and Vice Chairman elected for a 2 year term. Elections will take place at the first meeting of the relevant calendar year.
- The Forum will meet a minimum of 3 times a year (in addition to the Annual Public Conference). Task and finish groups/sub-groups will undertake specific projects as required.
- There will be an Annual Coast and Estuaries Conference to disseminate progress to a wider audience and be a scrutiny mechanism for the public and other stakeholders.
- Professional/officer support will be provided from within the partnership as required.
- There will be rotating secretariat/administrative support (currently Local Authorities, EA & the AONB have offered support).

In addition to each partners' existing area of responsibility, there is a need to integrate with other key organisations that have an impact/influence on the Suffolk coast. Identified below are which organisation should take lead responsibility for making the link with the Suffolk Coast Forum. In this way it is possible to keep the Forum to a workable number and make best use of resources of within the partnership:

Environment Agency nationally and Defra	EA/LAs
East Anglian Coastal Group	SCC / SCDC & WDC Officers
New Anglia LEP	LA representation.
LGA Coastal SIG (and officers Group)	LA Portfolio holders / officers (officers)
Inshore Fishing Conservation Authority	SCC
Marine Protected Areas (inc MCZ)	NE / MMO
Suffolk Flood Risk Management Partnership	SCC
Spatial Planning	LAs
Marine Planning	LAs/MMO
SMPs	EA / SCDC & WDC
Local Strategic Partnership	LAs
Greenest County Partnership	SCC
AONB Partnership	AONB Manager

Regional / National Bodies

The needs, priorities and opportunities along the Suffolk coast need to be championed and engaged with at a regional and national basis. Whilst there may be others, there are a number of key organisations that need clear links with the Suffolk Coast Forum.

The first grouping are those bodies that have a *direct* influence on FCERM in Suffolk; the second grouping are bodies that *influence* or *potentially fund* FCERM and other coastal activities (although the distinction is not precise). These include:-

Defra and other Government Departments

Defra is the Government Department with responsibility for FCERM, the marine and terrestrial environments and water quality/availability. However, other government departments, notably the DCLG with its responsibility for planning have influence over management of the coast and its hinterland.

Environment Agency, Natural England, Marine Management Organisation are national bodies sponsored by Defra. All have some form of local/regional structures and will be key players within the new Suffolk Coast Forum. The EA has a 'strategic overview' role for FCERM and responsibility the national FCERM strategy and funding. Its role also covers a range of environmental and water quality/availability matters that have direct links to coastal management. NE's role is largely in relation to protected environments (land and sea) and the MMO's role covers planning, licensing and conservation of the marine environment.

East Anglian Coastal Group (EACG)

This group covers from Gibraltar Point to the Thames barrier and aims to:

- To give sound advice on coastal issues and be a strong influencer in optimising strategic and sustainable policies, plans and programmes to best manage the risk from sea flooding and coastal erosion whilst recognising the relationship with environmental and socio-economic issues.
- To be a natural and chosen forum for coastal practitioners to discuss problems and share best practice.
- Monitor SMP production, delivery and report back to Defra as required.

The group also provides a direct conduit to Defra policy makers and to all levels of the Environment Agency. The EA, MMO, NE and RFCCs are represented on this group.

Anglian Region (Eastern) Regional Flood and Coast Committee (RFCC)

The structure now in place (Flood and Water Management Act 2010) has the aim of:

- Delivery of Resilience Partnership funding
- Determining local FCERM priorities, raising levies and approving work programmes
- Working with communities and other to identify alternative funding streams
- Balancing priorities and making sure investment is co-ordinated at the catchment and shore line management scale.
- Considering climate change in local decision making.

Membership comprises County and Unitary members of Norfolk, Suffolk (Cllrs Guy McGregor and Tony Goldson), Essex, Southend and Thurrock plus those appointed by EA. The 'coastal' appointee is currently Cllr Andy Smith from SCDC.

The RFCC is central to the raising of funds, via the levy on County and Unitary authorities; the allocation of funding and co-ordinating of activity. It is hoped that the Suffolk Coast Forum will assist RFCC members in understanding and considering the relative priorities for FCERM and promoting the importance of coastal issues. The RFCC Chairman is invited to be a member of the Forum.

Bodies with influence:

New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Aiming to create the best environment for business to develop and innovate, creating prosperity and bringing global recognition to key businesses sector. The priority areas are tourism, energy, advanced engineering and business support. Clearly tourism and energy in particular are coastally focused. In addition issues such as broadband are high on the LEP agenda as well as for coastal communities.

Membership of the LEP Board consists of 7 business leaders, 6 local authority members and 1 from education. The LEP will have an increasingly important function of accessing funds and engagement with the business community many of whom are dependent on their coastal location. Depending on membership of any county wide coastal group potentially Essex, Kent and East Sussex LEP is also relevant.

Local Government Association – Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG) ‘.. to establish governance, management and community well-being to ensure that the UK has the best managed coast in Europe, and to identify appropriate and sustainable funding strategies to support this aim.’

Representing local authorities to:

- a. Bring pressure on the Government to achieve a step change in the level of funding to overcome present and future problems
- b. Use every opportunity to secure full involvement of local government at all levels of policy formulation concerning the coast
- c. Strongly oppose any changes which take responsibility and decision-making powers out of the hands of local democratic leaders.

Currently Suffolk CC, Waveney and Suffolk Coastal DC are all represented at both member and officer level on this group and Cllr Andy Smith is the SIG vice-chair. In addition officers have a working subgroup called SIGSOG.

Haven Gateway Partnership (HGP) The Haven Gateway Partnership is a framework through which partner organisations can work together to promote the economic opportunities in an area stretching from Aldeburgh to south of Colchester. Focus is on amongst other issues ports and green infrastructure. It has five subgroups including Planning and Regeneration and Business, tourism and culture. All the southern based Suffolk local authorities are represented on the Board.

East Suffolk Partnership

Proposals are currently underway to reconstitute Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Local Strategic Partnerships into a new organisation working with local communities. More details to follow.

Other key issues:

Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership

The AONB covers the majority of the Suffolk coastline and estuaries and working area extends into Essex on the southern shore of the Stour. Its Partnership has 26 members representing a wide range of social, economic and environmental interests. The partnership has a broad range of expertise and a management plan. The AONB Unit has expertise in community engagement, local delivery and supports the four community estuary partnerships. Within the structure outlined above the AONB operates at local, area and county level and has national links to other AONBs.

The formation of the Suffolk Coast Forum is an opportunity to clarify and strengthen the AONB Partnership's roles and responsibilities, supporting the integration of physical coastal issues, spatial planning and economic development.

FCERM Funding

The new FCERM funding mechanisms require (in many cases) finance to be raised locally to fully fund projects. The AONB Unit or the Estuary Partnerships (for instance) are unable to legitimately handle the significant funds required for major works along the estuaries.

An example of this was the trial to improve the Butley estuary wall, which used the East Suffolk IDB as the delivery organisation. IDBs may be able to deliver more cost effective reconstruction work on estuary walls.

Issues such as an enhanced role of the Internal Drainage Boards to deliver both financial management and the practical works, will be a major consideration for the new Suffolk Coast Forum.

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