

**Environment Agency**

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www.environment-agency.gov.uk



## Minutes

**Project Name:** Brandeston Control Boards Stakeholder Meeting

**Project Ref:** FR/03/201-001

**Produced by:** Naomi Drown

**Role:** Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) Officer

**Date:** 16/12/2014 The Queen's Head, Brandeston

Present:

Dr Paddy Fielder (PF)

Graham Edhouse (GE)

Lord & Lady Cunliffe (Ld C) (Ly C)

Charles Croll (CC)

Steve Weston (SW)

Naomi Drown, Will Akast, Chris Finbow-Environment Agency (ND) (CF) (WA)

Penny Hemphill-Suffolk Wildlife Trust (PH)

Jane Burch- Suffolk County Council (JB)

Not present:

Daniel Norman

CF explained the background to the Brandeston water control boards report produced and previously circulated by the Environment Agency. CF also talked about H&S issues related to the current timber boards and the possible options for the future of the Brandeston Water Control Boards and structure.

The key possible options are:

- i) Removal of the structure
- ii) Refurbishment with landowner operation and maintenance
- iii) Removal of the structure and replacement with stone and gravel riffles and pools

CF explained how there was no funding available for other options due to the low flood risk to people and property at the site. Funding for removal or refurbishment of the boards would come from Environment Agency (EA) Flood & Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) budget. Funding for riffles and pools would be partnership funded with

feasibility and design coming from EA Water Framework Directive (WFD) and FCRM budgets, and the works on the ground being paid for by flood levy funding.

CF, ND and WA summarised the requirement under the WFD for the Environment Agency (and other organisations) to make existing structures in rivers (such as weirs, sluices and gauging stations) passable to fish and eels. Structures that perform a critical function (such as managing flood risk management or measuring water flow) will need to be made passable to fish while structures that do not perform a critical role can be considered for removal, where appropriate.

The Brandeston Water Control Boards and structure could potentially be removed and replaced with a series of stone and gravel riffles and pools that will not increase flood risk to people or property and will maintain upstream river water levels as they are now. The riffles and pools will also significantly improve river habitats by providing additional fish spawning and invertebrate habitat, increasing oxygenation of river water and enabling fish and eels to move freely up and downstream. This option would also remove the need for ongoing maintenance. There may need to be some adjustment to the riffles in the early stages after installation as the new features bed in. The site for the riffles and pools would be decided after further modelling and bed level surveying and the design will be brought back to the group for discussion. Water level monitoring equipment will be put in place to monitor any changes to levels and to ensure that there are no impacts at all on wells supplying water to a number of properties in the village.

JB explained the Deben Holistic Water Management Project and how it seeks to link up all aspects of water management across the River Deben catchment – flooding, water resources, water quality and the river environment. See [www.greensuffolk.org/hwmp](http://www.greensuffolk.org/hwmp) for details. The proposed work at Brandeston is one example of the type of the sustainable approach we are taking to future river management.

There was discussion about why the boards were put in originally and why water levels were managed through the year. SW said that the boards may have been installed as part of a water abstraction scheme at Cretingham golf club.

The role of the Earl Soham river support bore hole was discussed.

SW mentioned that the river at Earl Soham was straightened in the past and that there used to be a mere there. SW stated that the river was moved towards Brandeston Hall about 100 years ago for amenity reasons.

There was conversation about phosphate levels in the Deben and whether phosphate stripping would be fitted to sewage treatment works in the catchment, including at Debenham sewage treatment works. WA has contacted Environment Agency colleagues for more information and can confirm that phosphate stripping has not been fitted to Debenham sewage treatment works. Phosphate stripping is not proposed in the near future at Debenham sewage treatment works but we can provide more

information on our water quality work with water companies and the water quality of the Deben if required. .

GE and PF raised concerns over the maintenance of water levels in their wells. CF, ND and WA confirmed that maintaining water levels in the domestic wells was the highest priority for any project at Brandeston.

Lady Cunliffe asked about climate change and how that might affect the river levels in the future. WA explained how summers were expected to get hotter and dryer and winters warmer and wetter with potentially higher winter river flows and lower summer flows in our rivers.

WA shared a copy of the Deben Action Plan map that the Environment Agency has produced. This map (which will be shared via email with the minutes of the meeting) shows the key issues relating to water quality, fish passage and river habitats that need to be addressed in the Deben catchment to meet the requirements of the WFD.

There was discussion on how rivers were historically over widened and deepened and straightened to remove meanders and how structures had been put in to the river to maintain water levels, and how this had created problems we need to address today to improve our river water quality and habitats for people and for wildlife while not increasing flood risk.

CF summarised the issues and the options were explained again. There was discussion on when works could go ahead (late summer/early autumn is the best time of year when river levels are typically lower, ground conditions are dry and fish, bird and water vole breeding seasons have finished), and the protected species mitigation works that will be implemented working closely with Suffolk Wildlife Trust. CF, ND and WA confirmed that the project would not start without the Environment Agency guaranteeing that we could complete the works.

There was discussion about the involvement of the school, and the need to contact the school and arrange a meeting ASAP. ND and WA met the headmaster and Operations Manager at Brandeston School on 5<sup>th</sup> February and the school are happy with the proposals. Other landowners that would need to be contacted were mentioned and it was agreed that ND would write a letter to circulate to other interested parties as well as minutes from this meeting. There are 6 houses on Friday Street that need to be contacted, as well as the Parish Council.

At the close of the meeting there was support in favour of removing the structure and replacing it with a sequence of riffles and pools to maintain upstream water levels and improve river habitats. CF explained that the Environment Agency have £10K in this

year's budget (financial year 14/15) to undertake feasibility and design work and that this work will be commissioned as soon as possible.

There was discussion on where the riffles and pools might be placed, and PH and ND explained why this could not be finalised without further investigation and habitat survey.

GE confirmed that he would like more investigation done into the implications on the social/people aspect of the project, and further investigation on the relationship between river and groundwater levels.

CF mentioned again that this would be a good case study for future projects working on in-river structures and that it would be very helpful if we could bring other landowners to the site in the future.

After the meeting PF, GE, ND and WA travelled to Homersfield on the River Waveney to look at the riffle and pools that were installed in 2013 when Homersfield sluice was removed.

#### Actions-

ND to write letter to landowners.

ND to send thank you card to Tim and Anna at the Brandeston Queens head.