

NEWSLETTER

Cuckmere Estuary Pathfinder Project

Issue 3

Welcome to Issue 3 of the Cuckmere Pathfinder Project Newsletter



Cuckmere photo © Mark Fosh

In this issue of the newsletter...

The Pathfinder Project is now well under way. Earlier in February we published new research on the landscape, visitors, economy and heritage of the Estuary, and we held the first of our public evidence events at which the research teams presented and discussed their findings with the community. See page 3 for a summary of the research findings.

More than 60 people attended the event, and 95% of people felt it gave them a good chance to air their views. The second evidence event will be held on 5 April.

The first of our intensive workshops has also taken place, at which members of the community identified six possible approaches to the future management of the Cuckmere. You can read more on page 2 of this newsletter. In March we will be agreeing the criteria against which these options should be assessed. This will then be presented and discussed at the main public meeting on 7 June.

We hope that, through this work, we can ensure that everyone's views have been taken into account and all options have been carefully considered before we make any decisions about the future management of the Cuckmere.

If you have any questions or comments then please don't hesitate to contact us.

Andy Robertson, East Sussex County Council

Celebrate Cuckmere Exhibition

10-19 June 2011, Seven Sisters Country Park (and other venues in Seaford)

An exhibition celebrating Cuckmere's beautiful and dynamic landscape will be held at the Seven Sisters Country Park and at various venues in Seaford this June. The exhibition is timed to coincide with a major public event being held on 7 June as part of the Pathfinder Project.

The aim of the exhibition is to actively engage the local and wider community in an appreciation of one of Britain's most iconic coastal landmarks. Artists - both amateur and professional - are invited to submit work inspired by the Cuckmere Valley and the best of these will be selected to form part of the Celebrate Cuckmere exhibition. The submissions can take the form of paintings, photographs, embroideries, sculptures poetry or prose and reflect Cuckmere's past, present or future. Works can be old, new, for sale or on loan. Looking ahead, the exhibition will act as a launchpad for the Friends of Cuckmere Association whose remit will be to protect the future interests of the Cuckmere Valley.

Dates of the exhibition are 10-19 June 2011. Details of submission dates and general exhibition information will soon be available at: www.celebratecuckmere.com

Options agreed

Members of the community have drawn up a list of possible approaches to the management of flood risk at the Cuckmere. The six options were agreed during the first workshop held as part of the Pathfinder Project on 14 December 2010.

Option A: Partial breach of the flood defences. This would involve breaching the embankments in two of three 'cells' in the Estuary in order to restore the Cuckmere to a naturally functioning estuary, and to encourage the development of saltmarsh. A new embankment would prevent flooding in other areas and protect the Foxhole Valley.

Option B: Full breach of the flood defences. This would involve breaching the embankments in all three of the cells to restore the naturally functioning estuary, including allowing water to enter the meanders. A new embankment would be created to protect the A259.

Option C: Engineered reactivation of the meanders. This would involve undertaking engineering works in order to restore the meanders to their natural flow.

Option D: Maintain the existing defences. The defences are currently maintained by the Environment Agency, but this maintenance is being withdrawn partly because of the cost. This option involves encouraging riparian land owners to share this cost, estimated at over £6 million over the next 100 years.

Option E: Sustain/improve the existing defences – longer term. This would involve reinforcing the river embankments and building them up by 300mm initially to preserve the Cuckmere over the shorter term. A second phase of reinforcement and enlargement would be planned to take place in 20-50 years time, together with the addition of new sea defences and other engineering works.

Option F: Sustain/improve the existing defences – shorter term. This is an alternative approach to sustaining the existing defences whereby the river embankments would be raised by 300mm and widened in places, with minimal further engineering work undertaken, to cope with raised water levels predicted over the shorter term.

A more detailed description of the options is published in a report by the Cuckmere Community Forum, available at www.cuckmerepathfinder.org.uk.

New research published

Four new research studies have been commissioned as part of the Pathfinder project. The first phase of the studies, which looks at the current situation in the Cuckmere, has now been published. The second phase will look at what might happen in the future, and will be presented and published on 5 April.

Copies of all reports are available from <http://www.cuckmerepathfinder.org.uk/About-project/New-research.aspx>.

Visitor survey

This research was commissioned to identify who visits the Estuary and find out more about their visit, including what they enjoy most, how much they spend, where they come from and their mode of transport. Amongst its key findings so far are:

- Most people (71%) are day trippers.
- Walking is by far the most popular reason to visit.
- Most people come to see the shingle beaches and the meanders.

- The sea views and views of the chalk cliffs were what people most enjoyed.
- The average spend per person per day amongst holiday makers was about £25.00.

Heritage Assets Plan

This detailed report looks at the rich heritage contained within the Cuckmere Haven. It is based on new analysis, including a detailed walkover of the site, geoarchaeological surveys, and a review of existing data. It concludes that:

“the Haven contains a plethora of heritage assets in many forms and from many periods. It contains evidence of a remarkable variety of activities ranging from medieval engineering, medieval and post-medieval farming, industrial exploitation and defence. Some of the evidence exists as prominent historic landscape features such as the medieval embankments and military defence features and others have less of an immediate impact, but by undertaking a modest degree of research are no less interesting, such as the potential evidence for salting. There is enough evidence both visible and below the ground to be able to suggest a reconstruction of the landuse and exploitation of the valley for nearly a thousand years.”



Ponies grazing over the Cuckmere

Landscape assessment

This report extends and updates landscape information prepared by Jacobs Babbie in 2006 commissioned by the Environment Agency. It updates the planning context (with particular reference to the creation of the South Downs National Park), and considers the Coastguards Cottages and the Cable House, which it recommends be considered as 'landscape features of high sensitivity'.

Economic study

This report attempts to quantify the economic value of the Cuckmere Estuary. It looks at expenditure by visitors, presents some evidence gathered from businesses in the Cuckmere area, as well as the agricultural values of the land.

The study's findings so far indicate that, adjusting for costs, the net value to the local economy of the Cuckmere is just under £1.6 million, with an additional £400,000 net benefit to the wider Sussex community.

First public evidence event held

Over 60 people attended a public evidence event on 8 February, at which researchers presented the first phase of findings of the new studies on the landscape, visitors, heritage and economy of the Cuckmere.

Following the presentations, everyone had an opportunity to discuss the presentations and share their views at facilitated round table discussions. The evaluation of the event showed that:

- 81% found the information provided before the event either good or excellent;
- 95% of participants said they had enough opportunity to express their views;
- 63% of participants found the presentations to be either good or excellent;
- 87% found their round table facilitator to be either good or excellent.

The second phase of the research studies will be presented at a public evidence event on 5 April.

Please sign up for our forthcoming events

8 March 2011	Assessment criteria agreement (Intensive Workshop)
5 April 2011	Landscape, Visitors, Heritage and Economy of the Cuckmere: Evidence Presentation Stage 2 (Public Event)
12 April 2011	Options Assessment Pilot (Intensive Workshop)
7 June 2011	Planning for Change at the Cuckmere (Public Event)

To register to attend any of the engagement events please use our online booking form at www.cuckmerepathfinder.org.uk/Home/Booking-page.asp, or contact Lucy Auger at lucy@hopkinsvanmil.co.uk or 020 7821 6500 or 07985 659425.

For further information about the Cuckmere Pathfinder Project please contact Project Officer Adrian Davies on 01273 335926.

www.cuckmerepathfinder.org.uk