

NEWSLETTER

Cuckmere Estuary Pathfinder Project

Issue 5

A shared solution

On 7 June 2011 members of the East Sussex community made an important decision about the future of the Cuckmere. This issue of the Pathfinder newsletter focuses on that decision, and how it was reached.

East Sussex County Council is hugely grateful to the hundreds of people who have taken part in this process. What has made the Pathfinder Project so unique has been the very high level of community involvement from the start of the project. All of the decisions about the options to be considered and the criteria to be used have been made by members of the community working successfully together, and it has been the community voice which has now spoken so clearly about the preferred options for the Estuary.

East Sussex County Council will now consider the community's decision for formal endorsement. We will also be preparing a final report of the project to go to DEFRA, who have funded the Pathfinder Project, and we are looking forward to working with the new Friends of the Cuckmere group on implementing the next steps (see page 3).

This is not, of course, the end of the process of planning for change at the Cuckmere, but we can now move forward on the basis of consensus.

*Andy Robertson
East Sussex County Council*

Community reaches historic decision on Cuckmere future

At the final public meeting of the Pathfinder Project held on 7 June 2011 members of the community reached a consensus about the future of the Estuary.

The preferred option was to **maintain the existing defences for the time being**, and there was a feeling that this could be done more cost-effectively than had been achieved in the past.

There was a very strong consensus that the meanders are the most important feature of the Estuary, and that any long-term solution should seek to retain or enhance them. The community therefore decided to explore further the option of **reactivating the meanders as a longer-term solution**.

A report on the outcome of the 7 June event, produced by independent facilitators Hopkins Van Mil and including a full transcript of comments and views, is available online at www.cuckmerepathfinder.org.uk.

A final project report will be published over the summer.

How the decision was reached

Briefing and information sharing

It was particularly important that the decision taken about the future of the Cuckmere should be evidence based. All delegates attending the event on 7 June were sent a pack of information to read through in advance so that they could base their decision on the evidence that had been commissioned and gathered by the Pathfinder project. The team also ran a series of 'catch-up sessions' prior to the event.

The day began with a short introductory session by East Sussex County Council. Delegates then formed small groups at which they discussed their questions and comments about the options being assessed and the criteria to be used, both of which had all been drawn up by members of the community in previous engagement sessions.

The assessment process

Score cards were handed out, and each delegate was asked to rank each option against the criteria, from zero to five. The scores were tallied by a team from the University of Brighton.

The small groups were then shown the results of the assessments. There was no overwhelming 'winner', but two options emerged as frontrunners: Option D (maintaining the existing defences) achieved the highest ranking with a score of 3159, followed by Option C (reactivating the meanders) with a score of 2953.

Describing the assessment methods used, Henrietta Hopkins of Hopkins Van Mil, the facilitation team behind the Pathfinder project, said:

"We wanted the process to be as straightforward and transparent as possible, and to allow people the chance to find some common ground. It was particularly important that the community had agreed the options and the assessment criteria in advance. Because this has been a very inclusive process, building trust along the way, consensus was easier to achieve."

Reaching consensus

During the final consensus-building plenary session, everyone was given the opportunity to discuss the assessments. Andy Robertson chaired the discussion and summed up the decisions made by the community.

Those present agreed that the meanders are the most important aspect of the Cuckmere. People felt that while the option of maintaining the existing defences scored the highest, it did not ensure the long-term survival of the meanders. There was considerable interest in reactivating the meanders but also a need for more information and understanding of how this might be achieved. And so consensus was found on maintaining the existing defences while exploring the option of reactivating the meanders in the longer-term.

'There was quite a lot of consensus with C and D being very close, highlighting that the meanders are very important, as is environmental enhancement and access'. [Participant]

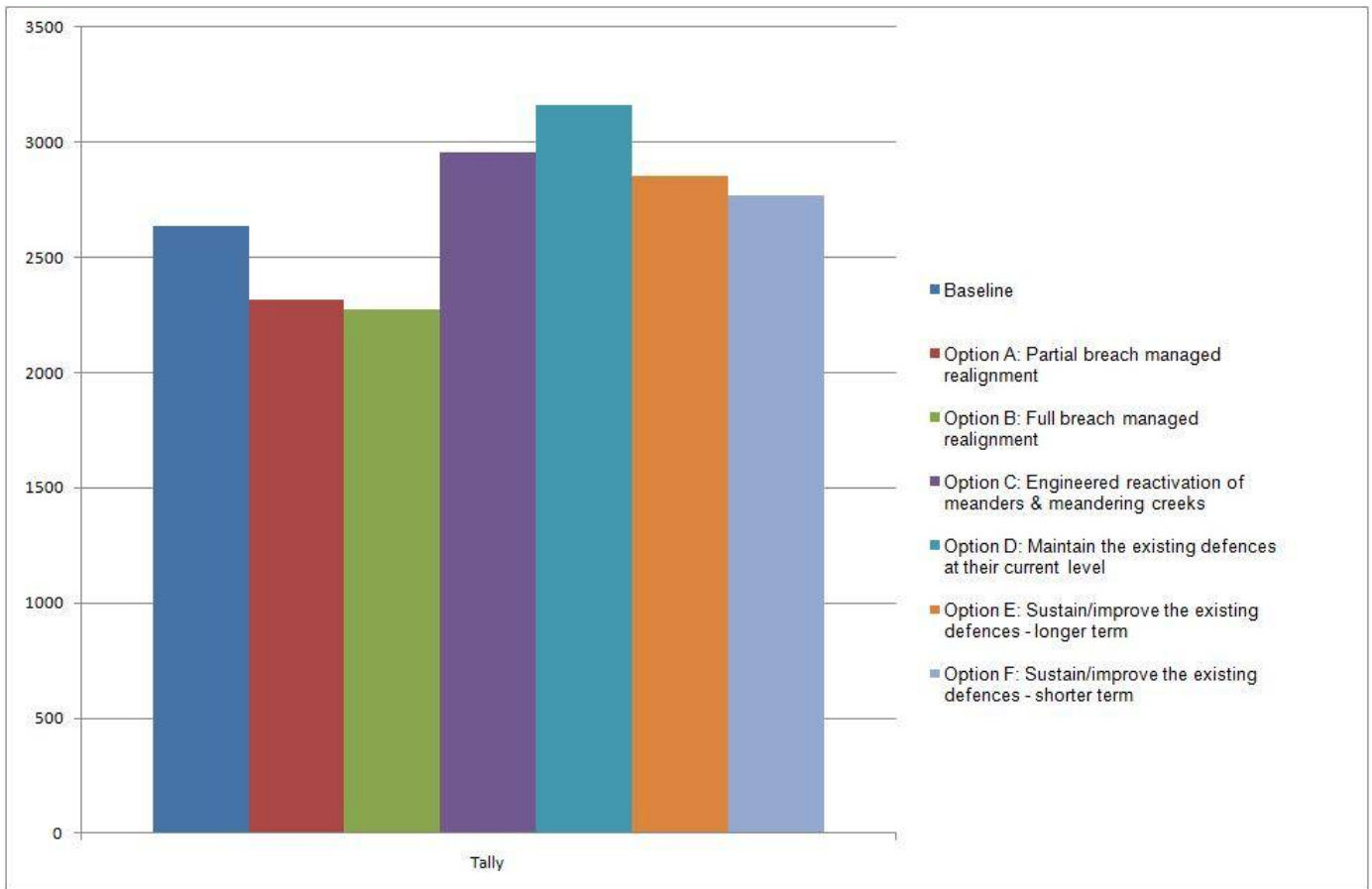
'The top two options have a similar product, they keep the meanders, although one involves heavy engineering and the other a light touch'. [Participant]

In summarising the consensus reached, Andy Robertson said: *'People value the meanders. Option D has come out as the preferred option with considerable interest in Option C in the longer term, but with some caveats including the need to explore this option further.'*

Options and scores

Option D: Maintain the existing defences	3159
Option C: Engineered reactivation of meanders	2953
Option E: Sustain the existing defences - longer term	2852
Option F: Sustain the existing defences - shorter term	2766
Baseline – do minimum	2638
Option A: Partial breach managed realignment	2315
Option B: Full breach managed realignment	2274

The community's assessment of the options



Next steps

A clear message to come out of the Pathfinder Project is that members of the community want to take the lead in determining the future of the Cuckmere.

Over 70 people have already signed up to join the new 'Friends of Cuckmere' group, which will aim to take forward the decision reached by the community on 7 June, supported by the partnership of organisations that have worked together on the Pathfinder project. A first step will be to understand the engineering requirements and costs of maintaining the existing defences, and how this work might be funded; then, to explore further the possibility of reactivating the meanders.

East Sussex County Council is committed to supporting and working with the Friends of Cuckmere over the coming months and years.

Anyone interested in joining the Friends of Cuckmere group can sign up online via the 'Get involved' section of the Pathfinder website.

The Pathfinder Project Board will continue to meet for the time being, while the Friends of Cuckmere is established.

In the meantime, East Sussex County Council will be submitting a final report on the Pathfinder Project to the project funder, DEFRA, over the summer.

The overall report on the project will also be posted on the pathfinder website and copies made available in local libraries.

www.cuckmerekpathfinder.org.uk

'Celebrate Cuckmere' celebrates success

Around 3000 art lovers flocked to the Seven Sisters Country Park in June to enjoy a wealth of professional artwork inspired by Cuckmere Haven.

The ten day long Celebrate Cuckmere event also saw hundreds of visitors take advantage of a unique opportunity to enjoy an insider's view of Cuckmere, as several of the famous Coastguard cottages opened their doors for the sale of teas and Cuckmere inspired artwork.

Five other venues within Seaford including two restaurants, a pub, a deli and Paul the Fishmongers also exhibited between them over 100 locally produced paintings, poetry and sculptures featuring Cuckmere Haven.

The Seven Sisters Country Park welcomed more than twice their usual number of visitors who came to admire pictures and photographs by artists such as Chris Drury, John Holloway, Harold Mockford, Julian Bell, 1930s artist Eric Slater, Michael Cooper, Julian le Bas and Jem Southam whose original photograph of Cuckmere Haven was kindly lent to the exhibition by the Towner Gallery, Eastbourne.

Mementos of Cuckmere Haven brought along by local residents were exhibited in a separate historical exhibition housed in the Visitors Centre, while Cuckmere related walks and talks held throughout the ten day period were all well attended.

'I thought the event was marvellous - it was fascinating to have so many paintings of Cuckmere in one place and to see local artists exhibiting next to more renowned artists'. Visitor Sarah Hunter

'I think the Celebrate Cuckmere festival was a real achievement. My workshops at the coastguard cottages were well attended and the students produced exciting work painting from the garden and house. I think that the atmosphere around the whole event was very positive and inclusive'. St Anne's Galleries artist Tom Benjamin, who hosted workshops at the Coastguard Cottages

'This was a very successful enterprise, both artistically with its connections to the past via the collection at the Towner, for the present in how the community value this amazing place and it raises questions for the future in that this is not a static landscape; it will change and it is the purpose of art to both foresee and to reflect this change'. Heart of Reeds artist Chris Drury



Eric Ravillious, Cuckmere Haven, 1939. An exhibition quality print of this famous image was loaned to the Celebrate Cuckmere event by the Towner, Eastbourne