

CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH AT 26th ANNUAL BARBECUE HELD AT COWTON 6th AUGUST 2017

Very good to see so many of you here- clearly undaunted by the massive winds of the past few days

First, I'd like to express our great thanks to Simon and Sheena Barrow for allowing us to come to this magnificent hilltop. It is very generous of them to put up with such an invasion and to have gone to such trouble mowing paths for us and our sitting places- I saw this only a week or two ago and great works have gone on to tame the undergrowth which had sprung up following the series of torrential downpours we have seen over the last few weeks. Thank you very much.

Second, I normally thank our barbecue master mind at the end but today is a special day. Paul Walkden with his family have organised five tremendous events over the last five years. I cannot say how grateful I have been to have such a consummately efficient, effective and smooth running operation from sign posting to ensuring our marquee, food and drink, indeed puddings are in place. So today I'd like to present them with this bowl and jugs as a huge thank you for having done so much and so willingly and my only regret that this is their last event, Thank you very much,

I would also like to say a huge thanks to Caroline Boyd and her excellent team of volunteer salad makers. This year has been no exception. It seemed hard to surpass last year's but I think all deserve even greater thanks this year. This too is Caroline and Robin's last of their five years of organisation, I would like to present them with a salad bowl and serve to remember the barbecues by.

Thank you too to Stannards of Saxmundham who unflinching provide deliciously cooked meat. And to Diana Paterson, now Grayburn, who despite the diversion of getting married only a month ago has as always managed the ticketing so well. (Thank you John who may have helped too!) and congratulations to them both again.

Just being here gives us all a jewel of a view of the estuary which we all know and love. The Alde and Ore Association exists to preserve and protect it. Looking across we can see clearly that if we did not have the river walls which our ancestors have built over the centuries, we would not have the river to sail, swim or canoe in and the green pastured marshes would be bare mudflats, instead, we have a good mix of fields giving habitat for both wild and domesticated creatures, intertidal lands which are home to many wading birds, river walls to walk on and a navigable river.

To keep the estuary going largely as it is requires a big heave by all of us. The government has insufficient funds to keep the walls in good repair. We have been fighting to ensure we preserve our estuary. Following the Alde and Ore Futures, when the resounding local response was manage the estuary as a whole, not simply protect the pockets near the two towns and odd village, the community has got together to prepare a plan to bring the walls up to a standard to withstand overtopping in a 1:200 year surge, such as we had in 1953.

I know people can get confused by the various bodies involved in putting the Alde and Ore River defences into good shape. The AOA with SCDC and EPP designed and set up the AOEP (Alde and Estuary Partnership) - a partnership of parishes, and representatives of local sectors whether river users, residents, businesses, land owners, farmers and the environment as a whole. The Partnership is charged with preparing an estuary wide plan and then implementing it. We now have a splendid plan, on which there has been much consultation, and the plan has been approved by the key authorities with the status of being a matter of material importance in planning terms. We are starting implementation.

The next great task, already well in hand, is raising the funds to deliver the plan. For this the AOEP set up the AOET, a fully incorporated charitable trust, so that money paid by citizens can benefit from gift aid and donors can be confident that their money will be properly handled and accountable and used for the proper purposes.

So, if there seem to be a plethora of bodies- the Partnership is about developing the Programme and delivering the Plan, while the Trust is essentially the Treasury to ensure the funds raised to be spent on the plan are used effectively and transparently. The AOA remains concerned about All aspects of the Estuary, the walls are very important but so are considerations like planning, greater regulation of the marine habitat, and encouraging enjoyment of the area with events such as we have today, and many walks.

So coming to fund raising- the current estimate is that our Estuary needs in total some £12million and of which around £1 ½- 2 m may be expected from the Environment Agency. This is doable. We are going to succeed but it will take the entire community working together.

The plan is to secure around £5-6 m from the land owners and farmers, indeed they have already voted to pay a huge increase in their levy rates. They will also be giving land, at no charge, for what will be carefully chosen single or very limited number of houses, under enabling development rules which means a huge enhanced value can be raised towards the funds. Any development is viewed with great concern, but there are very strict rules about what would be permissible and there will be extensive consultation on the sites. There would be little point in having new housing that ruined the area we all seeking to protect. We need to find a balance in finding funding while protecting our area. The AOEP ED team are having meetings with parishes about the first phase of possible sites and are seeking to be transparent as possible, sounding out views on the ideas and then returning for further discussions, when more details are needed or making changes to the original ideas. It will take some time to finalise any site which may be suitable for consideration. If you are concerned, get in touch - the AOEP is just as concerned to get things right. Communication both ways is very important. If the Association can help we will. Together as a community, we want to ensure a future for our beautiful landscape.

The other £5 million has to come from the efforts of the community and securing possibly grants from organisations such as HLF. We already have the very generous £630,000 which David Andren left as a bequest, an example he hoped others would follow. The main launch to bring in substantial sums from the community begins in October. There will be many events as we all have to help sustain our amazing estuary. There will be an estuary-wide pub quiz which will be held in 17 pubs on 23 November – so do go on line www.aoep.co.uk look under Events for a list of pubs and make sure you book your table now!

The funding plan must succeed. If it fails we will not save the estuary we see before us, our way of life and leisure we, and all our families, have focused on will disappear. We must all do our bit to make it succeed.

And now we should continue our enjoyment of this special place. Puddings will be served shortly but first, I would like to thank Nick Raison and Sarah Gallop very much for adding to our occasion today with their musical lexicon. They will be playing a while longer but please listen to this next

song which begins with its normal popular rendition but quickly you will hear how valuing our land is very much close to all our hearts.