

## **FIVE ESTUARIES HRA COMPENSATORY SITES FOR LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS**

Consultation 5 December 2023 to 31 January 2024

### **Response by the Alde and Ore Association**

*The Alde and Ore Association has some 2000 members. (Registered Charity No. 1154583). Its charitable objectives are to preserve for the public benefit the Alde, Ore and Butley Creek rivers and their banks from Shingle Street to their tidal limits and such of the land adjoining them or upstream as may be considered to affect them, together with the features of beauty and or historic or public interest in that area.*

The Association is not against the principle of enclosures to protect nesting Lesser Black-Backed Gulls but does have concerns and comments on the details of the proposals.

#### **1. The Association objects to Site VE 4 at Chantry on several grounds:-**

##### **i. The site is surrounded on all sides by public footpaths**

Gulls are unlikely to nest given the frequent presence of walkers and their dogs. Re-routing the footpath would lose the area a very popular walk for residents and the many visitors to Orford, who enjoy walking alongside the river, being able to watch passing sailing boats: the popular circular walk, or shorter walk to Chantry and then back, is a valued asset to the local economy, attracting many visitors.

Gulls are very protective of their young when they begin to fly and will attack or threaten people and dogs (this happens in Aldeburgh town most years). For a mid summer period, say three weeks, walking by a gull enclosure could be dangerous.

The ground surface and underlying soil, silt, peat and similar, in the land closed off from the river is totally different to the dry shingle shoreline with its naturally sparse vegetations of variable height The strong grass growth and damp soil present behind the walls is most unlikely to attract the gulls.

##### **ii. Prevention of completion of flood defence plans**

The Association would strongly object if the proposed enclosures would prevent the planned construction of improved flood defences, without which the land and homes behind the river walls could become flooded. The Estuary's river embankment improvement Plan, for its 44 km of walls, agreed after full public consultation and endorsed by local councils and the Environment Agency's Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, is in the process of being implemented. It has taken more than ten years to get to this stage and if the proposed gull enclosure prevented part of the wall improvement, there would be an Achilles heel leading to flooding in the Orford area, affecting homes, businesses, infrastructure, agricultural land and freshwater abstraction.

( please note the river walls have been built and constantly renewed since the twelfth century and are an integral part of the Alde and Ore Estuary landscape. If not renewed the area will become flooded, becoming an area of intertidal mud losing both assets of the local economy, homes and be of no use to nesting gulls)

#### **2. Sites VE 1,2,3 raise concerns and on some aspects the proposals are not clear.**

i. The Association's concern in relation to these three sites is that they should not have any impact on the existing flood defences of the area bordering the River Alde and Ore. It is understood that if clay is needed to repair those walls, it will not be permitted to bring in clay material from the mainland on ecological grounds, quite apart from the access difficulty of doing so: it is therefore essential that any gull

enclosure would not prevent access to securing the clay which underlies VE1 and VE3. We also understand there may also be a legal issue regarding ownership of the ground within these areas which would cause a difficulty establishing a long term nesting area.

ii. The Consultation Document and accompanying posters put up on posts and poles in Aldeburgh Fort Green area seek to know who are the land holders of the roads providing access from the north to the 3 sites on the Ness. Five Estuaries will wish to be aware that:

-Access on foot from Aldeburgh to the sites is possible and certainly from the gate south of the Martello Tower requires the permission of the National Trust for areas VE1 and VE 3 and the Cobra Mist company for area VE2. Access is particularly discouraged in the breeding season as there are a good number of species in the Lantern Marsh area.

-Access by vehicles of any size on the coast south of the Martello Town is not possible after a couple of hundred yards. This is because although there was, until a few years ago, a haul road built along the shoreline, in 1968, erosion by the sea has washed it away for much of the shoreline leaving a long, loose shingle bank moved constantly in storms for some 4000 metres. The road could be rebuilt if the landowners did not object and the coast was not made more vulnerable to erosion. Restoration is, however, likely to require consent from Cobra Mist as the necessary shingle is likely to have to come from the area above the HW level, which is owned by them.

-Access is, we understand, owned by a number of bodies: the Fort Green Car Park and carpark extending south of it fall to a mix of East Coast Council and Suffolk County Council. The right of way along part of the sea wall alongside the Aldeburgh Yacht Club belongs to the Club.

-East Suffolk Council declared the whole of the area containing the roads identified in the Five Estuaries posters as being part of the extended Aldeburgh Conservation Area as recently as October 2023 That designation brings with it restrictions on what may be built and its use.

We have tried to understand the exact nature of what might be proposed by Five Estuaries for this Aldeburgh area and have contacted the enquiry point directly. While they were as helpful as they could be and went back to the planning team, we remained in the dark as to what the area might be wanted for except possibly access for those needing to create, manage and monitor the gull enclosures. If more than that is being considered, the consultation is deficient as we cannot comment on unknown proposals. *Note: We have now seen the FAQ updated on 23 January 2024 informing the public about not pursuing access from Aldeburgh but have left this point in our response in case the issue is revisited.*

Please be aware that the whole of the area subject to this consultation lies within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Natural Landscape and so is subject to all Natural Landscape (previously AONB) considerations.

31 January 2024

Alde and Ore Community Partnership

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