

Management of Sea Defences - Kingston Seymour

Key Facts

1. In 2011, the EA consulted on the long-term strategy for managing tidal flood risk in the Severn Estuary
<https://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/documents/s17905/EA%20Consultation%20-%20FAQs%20210713.pdf>
2. During this consultation, the EA received considerable opposition for the managed realignment of Kingston Seymour Sea defences. Community, Council, landowners, business organisations (such as CLA and NFU) and MP Liam Fox successfully fought the proposal. Refer to **Appendix G2** for the NFU Response.
3. The EA went on to formally apologise to community and acknowledge several factors had changed since 2011. This included updated climate change advice from Government noting reduced amount of sea level rise is being planned for. EA noted that one of the greatest causes of (community) concern in 2011 was proposals for managed realignment of flood defences to allow for creation of inter-tidal habitat. This is recorded in Parish Council minutes.
4. EA guidance on the management of sea defences states that 'managed realignment' and habitat creation projects are only taken forward with the agreement of land and property owners and with input from the community.
5. During the 2011 EA consultation on 'managed realignment' Dr Liam Fox MP wrote to The Rt Hon Mrs Caroline Spelman MP, Secretary of State ('Managing Flood Risk on the Severn Estuary' dated 1 June 2011) **Appendix N**. This acknowledged that realignment was mentioned in the Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) but pointed out that this reference to 'realignment' was in relation to 'very limited areas of the defences (at Congresbury Yeo) and not on the scale proposed during the 2011 consultation (which was essentially the full length from Clevedon to Middle Hope). This raised many still highly relevant) questions in relation to:
 - a. to the requirements of the Habitats Directive and the criteria for compensatory habitat.
 - b. the importance of preserving the important landscape with significant archaeological and historical (as detailed by Prof Steve Rippon University of Exeter)
 - c. Food security as there are no guarantees if salt marsh could be created and if so farmed (detailed lack of evidence supporting salt marsh creation in this location)
 - d. Loss of SSSIs
 - e. Questioned assessment on potential for future flooding which protects 37,000 homes protected by existing defences and raised the issue that maintaining existing defences was cheaper than creating new defences.
6. **The Severn Estuary Flood Risk Management Strategy** (a non-statutory document, not formally approved - 'working draft') identifies Clevedon to WSM (Congresbury Yeo) – as a strong case to maintain, sustain and improve options compared to adaption

- options (as the strategic need to for compensation habitat would be achieved from other sites) noting 100% of respondents favoured 'hold the line'.
7. However, this is then varied in the **Shoreline Management Plan 2** (a non-statutory document containing draft policies on shoreline management) and **NSC Local Flood Risk Strategy** which identifies Kingston Seymour for 'managed realignment' set back defences. This goes against the position established during previous consultations and is now subject to further discussion with EA. The CLAs response to the earlier 2009 version of the SMP which supports the maintenance of sea defences can be found in **Appendix O**.
 8. The Assessment of the Coastal Access programme under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 for Somerset Levels (which includes the Severn Estuary Special Area for Conservation, Special Protection Area and Ramsar site and SPA and North Somerset Bats SAC, July 2019) which was undertaken by Natural England review of coastal access impacts noted the following: *The Severn Estuary Coastal Group SMP (2017) noted that the SMP (for managed realignment in this location) would have potentially adverse effects on the Severn Estuary SPA, SAC and Ramsar Site. These were due to loss of intertidal habitats as a result of coastal squeeze, loss of terrestrial and freshwater habitats as a result of Managed Realignment, and changes to the shape of the estuary as whole, which could affect the way it functions. Its conclusions regarding the significance of these effects was uncertain and notes that more detailed assessment was needed as part of the emerging SEFRMS.*
 9. <https://n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/CD8.18%20Natural%20England%20Aust%20Brean%20Down%20Habitats%20Regulations%20Assessment.pdf>
 10. In 2024 EA spent 5.2 million on maintenance of the Kingston Seymour sea defences which protects 45,000 properties in North Somerset.

Implications

1. Managed realignment to create salt marsh is not supported by the community and landowners and as such would require the use of forced compulsory purchase powers which goes against EA guidance for managing such schemes.
2. As a result of EDFs salt marsh proposals and the overwhelming community and political opposition to the proposals; the ambiguity around the management of sea defences (and the high costs associated with realignment versus maintenance of current defences), Councillors have committed to work with EA in reviewing this policy.
3. The Severn Estuary Coastal Group state that 'managed realignment' would have potentially adverse effects on the Severn Estuary SPA, SAC and Ramsar Site.