



Adur Joint Strategic Sub-Committee  
6 March 2023

# ADUR DISTRICT COUNCIL

Key Decision [~~Yes~~/No]

Ward(s) Affected: All  
Cabinet Portfolio: Environment

## **Adur River Restoration & Sussex Bay Update**

### **Report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources**

#### **Officer Contact Details**

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#### **Executive Summary**

##### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. To update the Committee on progress with Adur Council's New Salts Farm and Pad Farm nature restoration projects on the Adur River.
- 1.2. To update on the successful award of two year project development funding (£500k) from the DEFRA Landscape Scale Recovery Pilot Programme for the wider Adur River, in partnership with the Knepp Wildland Foundation and other landowners, becoming one of the 22 flagship projects in the UK.
- 1.3. To provide progress with Sussex Bay, the vision for blue nature restoration across Sussex rivers, coast and sea being incubated by Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils and to recommend steps to be taken in 2023, subject to external funding.
- 1.4. To provide an overview of the Solent & Sussex Bay Research Partnership (4 local universities) that Sussex Bay has facilitated, and its success in securing £173k funding from the Natural Environment Research Council.

- 1.5. To underpin the commitment of Adur District Council to drive the recovery of nature in the area, to propose that its Climate Emergency Declaration be extended to also declare an Ecological Emergency.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. To note the contents of the report and the progress being made.
- 2.2. To agree to extend the Council's existing climate Declaration to include the Ecological Emergency.

## **3. Context**

- 3.1. Adur District Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and since then has driven a programme of change across decarbonisation, nature recovery, waste management, cycling, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and other areas.
- 3.2. The Council has been very proactive, securing significant funds from the government and the local enterprise partnership to support decarbonisation and nature recovery, along with its own sector-leading investment in nature recovery.
- 3.3. The early acquisitions of both New Salts Farm and Pad Farm in the Adur valley were early signals of intent in the light of the forthcoming implementation of Environment Act, and the opportunities to leverage funds to support nature's recovery.
- 3.4. Working with Worthing Borough Council, engagement and partnership with the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project and other marine projects has progressed into the development of the Sussex Bay vision over the last 18 months - the "blue mirror to the South Downs" with the Councils working to incubate an exciting Sussex wide vision for our rivers, coast and seascape.

## 4. Adur River Project Updates

- 4.1. **Adur River Test & Trial:** The Defra-funded Adur River Intertidal Habitat Restoration T&T project has been delivered to explore how income can be assembled from multiple sources to fund saltmarsh, mudflat and wetland restoration at New Salts Farm and Pad Farm, and to share learnings with landowners upriver to encourage broader participation in landscape scale schemes. Two workshops were held with local farmers and landowners from across the Arun to Adur, Upper Adur, and Eastern Downs regions.
- 4.2. The T&T took place between 1st April and 30th November 2022 and was led by Adur District Council, working closely with Finance Earth, a “natural capital” consultancy, Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust Ecology Services, CJH Agri-Environment Consultants and the Arun to Adur Farmers Group.
- 4.3. The project has directly influenced national policy development with the work presented at two webinars held with Defra policy teams working on the Environmental Land Management scheme.
- 4.4. **Adur River Landscape Recovery Pilot:** The development phase for the Adur River Restoration Project was announced as one of 22 national Landscape Recovery projects successfully funded. Adur District Council is one of 27 landowners involved and is also sitting on the Project Steering Group.
- 4.5. This Landscape Recovery scheme will explore and develop ways to revive floodplains, increase biodiversity, create new habitats and improve water quality through potentially re-meandering and re-naturalising floodplains. The project will build directly on the Test & Trial in terms of models for funding restoration.
- 4.6. This is being led by the Knepp Wildland Foundation with expertise input from Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust, and the Environment Agency.
- 4.7. The work will involve community and stakeholder engagement along the whole of the River Adur, following on from the work started in the Adur River Test & Trial. Engagement with local groups to progress this work and reach as many people as possible will take place in the Spring/Summer.

- 4.8. **Adur Estuary Sub-Group of the Catchment Partnership:** Natural England has committed funding for the production of two or three interpretation panels about the Adur Estuary SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and the group has assessed twelve sites for suitability. Consideration of locations focused on where craft are known to be launching into the estuary and sites where public footfall is known to be high and/or obvious stopping points along the river's edge.
- 4.9. Natural England are soon to carry out a full condition assessment of the SSSI as they are concerned about its continued decline.
- 4.10. There is a new email established to share information from this group to the wider community of concerned citizens. To receive the e-newsletter updates about the Adur Estuary, email [adurestuary@oart.org.uk](mailto:adurestuary@oart.org.uk) and ask to be added to the mailing list.
- 4.11. **Pad Farm:** A feasibility study looking at the potential to restore intertidal habitat at Pad Farm has identified a range of costed options. The Environment Agency is supportive of the project and has some funding available. Due to staff changes at the council, the plans for the site have not progressed beyond this point, but a new project team is picking up the restoration plans in Spring 2023.
- 4.12. **New Salts Farm:** A vision for the creation of Adur Community Wetlands at NSF has been developed as part of a funding bid submitted to National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for a 15 month development phase starting in early 2023. The funding bid reflected both the input and overwhelming support from the local community and over 48 local organisations.
- 4.13. Residents can sign up for updates on the New Salts Farm project by emailing [newsaltsfarm@oart.org.uk](mailto:newsaltsfarm@oart.org.uk) and requesting to join the mailing list.
- 4.14. Capital works will restore historical watercourses, enabling the creation of wetland, alongside meadows and wild scrub area as well as a community zone with biodiversity-friendly, sustainable food production.

## 5. Sussex Bay

- 5.1. Supported by £75k funding from Coast to Capital LEP, work to develop Sussex Bay has progressed strongly and a business case for 2 years of core funding has been developed which is now being discussed with a major charitable funder who has expressed keen interest to support.
- 5.2. Sussex Bay has developed three key initial work streams: a project development support service, the creation of a “Blue Natural Capital Lab” to create new financing approaches, and Blue Storytelling (championing stories of nature restoration, the regeneration of small boat fishing, innovation in seaweed and oyster farming, eco-tourism, etc).
- 5.3. Through Sussex Bay, we have developed strong links with the local universities: Sussex, Brighton, Portsmouth and Surrey, to the extent that a new Solent & Sussex Bay Research Partnership has been created which will coordinate all marine research across projects in Sussex Bay using £173k of Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) funding recently secured.
- 5.4. We are in the final stages of agreeing a partnership arrangement with The Crown Estate who own the seabed, subject to approval by members in due course, and this will be the first of its kind in the UK. This will be a much wider agreement and innovation partnership than the originally envisaged “trial lease”.
- 5.5. The agreement will allow exploration of innovative natural capital investment approaches for marine restoration, and give early stage investors confidence to support the work. We are in discussions with large scale investors and also local companies who have an interest in supporting nature restoration, for its own sake, but also with a view to accessing biodiversity, carbon and other “credits” to help offset environmental impact
- 5.6. Subject to success in achieving core funding, Sussex Bay will enter into its next phase of incubation and development, working with key partners to discuss and design the formation of a charitable entity to take the vision onto the next stage. Among others, Eastbourne & Lewes Councils have expressed keen interest to participate, as have several other key organisations.

- 5.7. The Sussex Bay vision aims to enable and drive the restoration of rivers, coast and sea, and through delivering this change, will increasingly work to drive social and economic renewal and growth, including business transition, new entrepreneurial industries in the marine environment, skills, eco-tourism and community health and well-being.

## **6. Engagement and Communication**

- 6.1. To reflect and underpin the work described, and to recognise the serious issues of biodiversity loss the work seeks to address, this report recommends the Council declares an Ecological Emergency, assisting in public and partnership communications and engagement.
- 6.2. Across all our nature restoration work, officers are in constant connection with local and national strategic partners. We meet regularly with Sussex Local Nature Partnership, and are members of the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project steering group and the Adur Estuary sub-group of the Catchment Partnership. We work closely with the Environment Agency, Sussex Wildlife Trust, South Downs National Park Authority, Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, other coastal local authorities, Blue Marine Foundation, DEFRA and The Crown Estate.
- 6.3. Our work to engage local communities at New Salts Farm and Pad Farm has involved fifteen stakeholder meetings/workshops to gather views and input on potential project activities, audiences, challenges (dog walking, access, covenants, constraints from neighbouring landowners), funding opportunities and the overall designs of the sites as well as to understand how they 'fit' within the wider landscape scale initiatives including Sussex Bay, Weald to Waves and the future Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 6.4. Over 700 local residents and community groups have been involved in developing plans for New Salts Farm via an online questionnaire, two public meetings, two online webinars and four walking tours - including two as part of the Wordfest Arts Festival.
- 6.5. Community engagement along the river was undertaken by Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust as part of the Defra-funded Test & Trial project. A report has been produced, providing useful insights into the current public perception and understanding of the lower Adur, how they currently use and value the area, and their thoughts on potential future

changes. 100% of people surveyed as part of the engagement were supportive of the habitat restoration plans at both New Salts Farm and Pad Farm.

- 6.6. The council-owned land holdings have allowed us to become a member of the Arun to Adur Farmers Cluster Group, providing multiple benefits and opportunities to work together in the future, including enhanced connection between the local community and the farmland and the involvement of farms in projects, from education to habitat enhancement and restoration.
- 6.7. Our Director, Paul Brewer, is a member of the UK steering group exploring the development of Marine National Parks, which is providing excellent access to other leading projects around the UK and beyond.
- 6.8. Our approach to exploring opportunities for nature recovery, carbon sequestration and landscape scale initiatives has been highlighted nationally, regionally and locally through a range of webinars.
- 6.9. Adur Council has been successful in being shortlisted as Green Council of the Year in the iESE Awards for this work, validating the Council's bold strategy to invest in land for nature recovery and develop a strategic approach through the Sussex Bay initiative.

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1. The project has been successful in leveraging a range of external funding for projects being managed by our partners.
- 7.2. Where partnership funding has been required, this has been funded from within existing budgets to date. However if any any time funding is required by members, a report outlining the proposal will be presented.

Finance Officer: Sarah Gobey

Date: 23rd February 2023

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1. s139 Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Councils to accept goods, property or money. All grant funding received must be used in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Funding Agreement under which it will be given.

- 8.2. The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 came into force on 27th June 2019 and increased the UK's 2050 net greenhouse gas emissions reduction target under the Climate Change Act 2008 from 80% to 100%.
- 8.3. Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.
- 8.4. s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation
- 8.5. Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Legal Officer: Joanne Lee

Date: 27/02/2023

### **Background Papers**

- [Sustainable AW framework 2021-2023](#)
- [Adur & Worthing Climate Assembly Recommendations Report 2020](#)
- Press release - Adur River Landscape Recovery Project funding  
<https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/news/archive/pr22-177.html>
- Press release - Defra Test & Trial funding  
<https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/news/archive/pr22-022.html>



## **Sustainability & Risk Assessment**

### **1. Economic**

Work to restore nature promises to create new opportunities for the coastal economy over the longer term. The trawler ban in the west of Sussex Bay is already helping fish and shellfish stocks begin to recover, and local fishers are reporting improved catches. We expect opportunities to emerge in the future for seaweed and oyster aquaculture, ecotourism and a local Sussex Bay fish brand which will help create a new nature-enabled economy.

The development of natural capital investment approaches will unlock investment into the local area, including providing opportunities for local companies to invest in nature positive and offsetting on their doorsteps

### **2. Social**

#### **2.1 Social Value**

The New Salts Farm project will involve a high level of community engagement, volunteering opportunities and ongoing opportunities for community participation, with a range of community organisations involved, including community growing, education and green social prescribing. Similar levels of engagement are planned for all projects going forward.

#### **2.2 Equality Issues**

Projects will pay specific attention to opportunities for inclusion of all sections of the community, undertaking equalities impact assessments as appropriate

#### **2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)**

Issue considered and none identified

#### **2.4 Human Rights Issues**

Issue considered and none identified

### **3. Environmental**

The projects and programmes described here represent a major intervention into the restoration of nature at scale in our local area.

### **4. Governance**

Issue considered and none identified