

JQD/S819

29 November 2004

Ladies and Gentlemen

East Head – A Call for Support

Overview

Chichester Harbour is a very special place, its combination of unique qualities make it a nationally important centre for boating, recreation and nature conservation. But the harbour and all it sustains is under threat because East Head, the sand dune feature at the entrance to the harbour, is suffering from rapid coastal erosion and may be lost. The Conservancy has resolved to try and protect East Head but it will need the help of the whole harbour community and national organisations in doing so.

This letter explains what is happening at East Head and what impact its loss may have on the socio-economic fabric of the harbour. It describes what the Conservancy are trying to achieve and how you can assist and support those efforts.

Chichester Harbour – A National Asset

The harbour is the largest purely recreational harbour in the country in terms of its size, number of vessels and the diversity of boating activity. There are 10,000 registered vessels in the harbour and 28,000 regular users supporting the 14 sailing clubs and 16 boatyards and marinas. The marine industry on the harbour directly employs over 600 people and is worth an estimated £200 million a year.

The fabulous landscape, the coastal footpath network and other special qualities resulted in the harbour being designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1964. These attractions combine with its national importance for habitats and wildlife to make the harbour a magnet for about 1.5 million tourists a year generating £15 million per annum for the local economy.

The 13 harbour-side villages, the fishermen and other interests add to the value of the harbour and make its protection a matter of overriding public importance.

East Head and the Impact of its Loss

East Head is a beautiful feature in its own right and is referred by many as ‘the jewel in the crown’ of Chichester Harbour. It provides the most attractive and safe anchorage in the eastern Solent and gives shelter to small craft in the Chichester Channel. It has immense amenity value and is a favoured spot for walkers and those

just seeking a day on the beach. But its role as a coastal defence feature and the impact of its loss on the wider harbour is of greatest concern.

There is historic evidence, supported by scientific research, to show that if a breach forms through the Hinge (the narrow neck of dunes where East Head joins the mainland) a tidal channel will form through the breach and it will not self heal. The same evidence and research show that when this happens the tidal dynamics and sedimentation patterns in the Chichester Channel are altered. When this occurred in 1963 an inner bar started to form across the Chichester Channel between Pilsey Sands and the Winner Bank. It is of note that when the breach was sealed by hard engineering, the inner bar that had been forming was removed by natural processes.

The impact of sedimentation and an inner bar forming in this part of the harbour will bite progressively as the bar gets higher and the water shallower. Ultimately the effects will be disastrous for mariners, the local community and businesses. The harbour will be less safe and it will lose its utility for larger craft and keel boats. It may create two harbours and reduce access from the eastern part of the harbour to the open sea.

At present, the sand dunes at the Hinge have breached over a distance of about 60 metres and the only thing preventing a tidal channel forming between Snowhill Creek in the east and the open sea to the west is the rock berm that the Conservancy installed in 2000. East Head is being rolled up from south to north and, if it is lost entirely, harbour-side settlements and the fragile coastal footpaths will also be subject to increased coastal erosion. Preserving East Head is the key to maintaining the harbour and its special qualities.

Action by the Conservancy

In seeking to protect East Head, the Conservancy will have to work closely with a number of statutory authorities and independent organisations who have the power to consent or veto any proposals that we may put forward. Chichester District Council are the planning authority and they will be advised by English Nature (the Government's advisers on nature conservation issues in SSSIs and European protected areas). The Environment Agency will have to consent any works and, of course, the approval of the landowners of East Head, the National Trust, and the adjacent land, West Wittering Estates, will be needed. Any proposed scheme will have to be shown to be sustainable, environmentally sympathetic and economically viable if it is to be accepted by the statutory regulators and the land owners.

In the short term, it will be imperative that the rock berm is retained in the ground and, if it is outflanked to the north, further work is undertaken to prevent a tidal channel forming at that point. If this is not done, there will be nothing left to protect in the longer term. Chichester District Council have undertaken to discuss both of these measures with English Nature who have, to date, objected to the retention of the rock berm. They are also examining the feasibility of reducing the size of the existing groynes to the south and west of the Hinge, with a view to trying to increase the amount of material feeding into the Hinge from the West Wittering frontage. This is all very positive action from the District Council and is most welcome, they are encouraged to pursue it vigorously.

In the long term, the Conservancy will submit a planning application for the protection of East Head. This cannot be done until the recommendations in the Coastal Defence Strategy for the coastline from Pagham to East Head are known. This is because we will not be permitted to undertake any works that may impact adversely on adjacent coastline and the Coastal Defence Strategy will determine what might be acceptable. The first draft of the Coastal Defence Strategy will be produced in December and we will be working with the District Council and others to develop an acceptable scheme.

Subject to the outcome of this work, it is intended that a planning application will be submitted in the spring and, provided any application is not called in for a Public Inquiry by the Secretary of State, it is hoped that work could start on site in the Autumn 2005.

Communications and Fund Raising

The Conservancy recognise that it will be important to keep the harbour community informed of what is happening and how they can help. To this end, a separate Communications Group will be established but, in the meantime, progress will be reported on our website www.conservancy.co.uk there is a link from the Home Page to an East Head section containing the latest information.

We have been advised that it appears most unlikely that central government funding will be available for any scheme to protect East Head. Any funding will have to come from private individuals and organisations, with some help from local authorities and organisations, namely the District Council and the Conservancy. Since donors will have to be persuaded that any proposed scheme will work, we will consult with them early on in the process to seek their views on potential schemes. The challenge will be to find a scheme that meets the requirements of the regulators and the Conservancy and enjoys the support of the funders. A separate fund raising group, preferably one that already has charitable status, will be set up.

How you can Help

We need your help to lobby the decision makers whose consent will be required for both the short term work that will be undertaken by the District Council, and for the long term scheme that will be submitted by the Conservancy in due course. We need to work with these decision making authorities and we do not wish to be confrontational, indeed this would be unhelpful. It is suggested that in writing to them, you support the work that the Conservancy and the District Council are doing and encourage them to do like wise. In doing so you may wish to use the information contained in this letter and the issues raised at Annex A. There are others and you are, of course, free to make whatever points you choose.

During the lengthy approval process for any scheme, we may need your help again to lobby specific organisations over specific issues and, if this is the case, the Communications Group will let you know how you can assist. Please keep an eye on the website.

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Who to Write to

A list of key decision makers and their roles and responsibilities in the determination of the future of East Head is shown at Annex B.

Yours sincerely

Martin Daws-Chew
Chairman Chichester Harbour Conservancy

Annex A
To JQD/S819
Dated 29 Nov 04

**East Head - Supporting the Chichester Harbour Conservancy
Issues That Might be Raised with Decision Makers**

East Head protects one of the most important natural features and its associated species in the harbour. Its function as a sea defence protects the entire eastern side of the harbour, its mudflats and saltmarsh. Without East Head the inner harbour will be subject to a much more erosive wave action and much of the priority habitat for which Chichester Harbour is designated will be lost.

Changes in tidal dynamics caused by East Head being allowed to breach will threaten the economic value of the harbour, its role as the premier recreational harbour in England and many jobs dependant on water recreation.

How can East Head be expected to perform 'naturally' when it is at the receiving end of major coastal protection works between Selsey and Portsmouth?

East Head is now 5 times the size of the dunes when they were breached in 1963. This increase in size is entirely due to mans intervention. If nothing had been done then they would have disappeared by now. Why then is this essentially temporary feature incorporated into the European Conservation Site designation?

What evidence is there that preventing a tidal channel forming will be detrimental to the dunes? Chichester Harbour as a whole is far too important to rely on the 'precautionary principle'

East Head is of prime importance to the character of the Chichester Harbour landscape it protects the wooded shoreline and maintains the natural, undeveloped appearance of the harbour prized by the AONB designation.

Organisational Roles and Responsibilities:

Defra

Defra has overall national responsibility for approving and funding coastal flood defence works by the Environment Agency and also approves and funds coast protection work carried out by local authorities. In addition, Defra is responsible for nature conservation issues via English Nature.

Margaret Beckett is Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with overall responsibility for Defra.

Ben Bradshaw MP, Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries, has responsibility for Nature Conservation, SSSIs and English Nature.

Elliot Morley MP, Minister for Environment and Agri-Environment, has responsibility for the Environment Agency, and Flood and Coastal Defence issues.

The Environment Agency.

The EA carries out Sea Defence works for the control of flooding under the Water Resources Act and Land Drainage Act. The EA is a partner with the local authorities in developing the Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy.

Chichester District Council is enabled under the Coastal Defence Act 1949 to carry out coast protection work and has a coastal defence role, particularly in developing the Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy. The District Council also acts as the Planning Authority for any proposed coastal defence schemes. **Havant Borough Council** has an input into the Coastal Defence Strategy as the adjoining authority. Both Havant Borough and Chichester District have responsibility for the socio-economic concerns relating to the Harbour, including tourism, recreation and marine industries.

The **County Councils** have input in providing funding for coastal defence projects through the district and borough councils. West Sussex CC and Hampshire CC have responsibility for maintaining access and rights of way in the amenity area.

The National Trust is the landowner at East Head.

English Nature is the authority responsible for nature conservation, reporting to Defra. English Nature implements the Habitat Regulations for European sites, and has powers to manage SSSI's under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

...../ See over for Lobby List

East Head Campaign Lobby List:

<p>Ben Bradshaw MP Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Nobel House 17 Smith Square London SW1P 3JR</p>	<p>Sir Martin Doughty Chairman English Nature Northminster House Peterborough PE1 1UA</p>
<p>Elliot Morley MP Minister for Environment and Agri-Environment Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Nobel House 17 Smith Square London SW1P 3JR</p>	<p>Rt Hon Margaret Beckett Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Nobel House 17 Smith Square London SW1P 3JR</p>
<p>Sir John Harman Chairman Environment Agency Rio House Aztec West Almondsbury Bristol BS32 4UD</p>	<p>Henry Smith Leader West Sussex County Council County Hall West Street Chichester West Sussex PO19 1RQ</p>
<p>David Gillett Leader of the Council Havant Borough Council Civic Offices Civic Centre Rd HAVANT Hampshire PO9 2AX</p>	<p>Ken Thornber CBE Leader Hampshire County Council The Castle Winchester Hampshire SO23 8UJ</p>
<p>William Proby Chairman The National Trust 36 Queen Anne's Gate London SW1H 9AS</p>	<p>Mrs J E Dunton Leader of the Council Chichester District Council East Pallant House 1 East Pallant CHICHESTER PO19 1TY</p>
<p>Andrew Tyrie MP MP Chichester House of Commons Westminster London SW1</p>	<p>David Willetts MP MP Havant House of Commons Westminster London SW1</p>