Minutes from the Deben Estuary Forum

Held on Monday 20th July 2026 at Waldringfield Sailing Club

Convened by the River Deben Association

Meeting	Deben Estuary Forum
Date	Monday 20th July 2026
Venue	Waldringfield Sailing Club
Attendees	Organisations represented: 25; Attendees: 29 (see Annex 1)

Format

Representatives gathered between 6:30pm and 7:00pm with a chance to mix over tea/coffee. In the meeting, led by Colin Nicholson (RDA Co-Chair) an update was provided on what has happened since the last forum in 2024 followed by a talk from the Crown Estate on their activities regarding the Deben Estuary and interactions with the Fairways Committees. Following the presentation, representatives went round the room introducing themselves, their organisation and items of interest/seen as issues. A general discussion ensued, facilitated by Colin Nicholson.

RDA Co-Chair Update

- The RDA Co-Chair gave progress updates on matters discussed at 2024's forum and other activity.
    - Speed of Boats: ESC working on amendments to River Deben Byelaws; Go-Slow Buoys – Kyson Fairways Committee implemented; Updates speed signage on banks – potential assistance from 'Wildlife Wise' once byelaws amended

      Action agreed: to continue with the revision of the byelaws and get correct wording to put to public consultation. Subsequent action on Jenny Riddell-Carpenter to assist with Parliamentary process

    - Considerate /Safe Use of River: Estuary Patrols by Police and Wildlife Wise; Felixstowe Ferry Foreshore Trust reviewing signage/conditions at their slipway
    - Water Quality: hugely improved systematic testing and transparency by Deben Climate Centre (30+ test points, 60+ volunteers, 1st Monday of Month)
    - King Charles III Coast Path Opened – September 2025
    - Dredging: Beneficial Use of Dredging application approved August 2025
    - Erosion/Breaches: Bawdsey/Waldringfield/Ufford
- The consequences of breaking the byelaws were discussed. Whilst a statutory fine could be enforced the lack of enforcement capacity was acknowledged. It was widely agreed that the importance of having clear byelaws was their ability to inform and educate. Suffolk Police do not have a marine unit any more so they call on the Essex Marine Police Unit from Burnham-On-Crouch for any water policing related issues. Although they do not patrol the rivers, they respond to antisocial behaviour etc. By contacting Suffolk police and reporting incidences with IDs and photos they would respond and or investigate. They intercept many jet skis launching from Essex and heading to Suffolk waters, equally they collect a database of repeat offenders.

Crown Estate Presentation

- A presentation on 'What the Crown Estates do in relation to the (Deben) Estuaries, interaction with Fairways Committees' was given by Emily Swift (Coastal Senior Asset Manager) and Peter Riches (Coastal Agent for The Crown Estate in East Anglia).
- An overview of the Crown Estate portfolio and activities was provided. Items of particular interest to the representatives gathered included:
    - Following a strategic overhaul initiated under new leadership at the end of 2019, The Crown Estate shifted from a historic profit-maximising approach to a holistic strategy that treats nature recovery as a foundation for economic resilience. This environmental mandate was formally solidified into statute when the Crown Estate Act 2025 modernised the body's powers, embedding sustainable development and specific nature targets into its core operations.
    - Internal re-organisation at the Crown Estate has led to the Coastal Portfolio (c.55% of UK's coastline) being separated from the Marine portfolio as that is now dominated by the offshore wind business. As such, the Coastal team are revisiting strategy by engaging with local authorities, communities and key customers. A new Coastal Strategy is to be presented in November 2026.
    - The Crown Estate owns the majority of the Deben Estuary below Mean High Water Springs. There are some exceptions, e.g. National trust off Sutton Hoo.
    - Approximately 1,000 boats are moored on the river.
    - Issues the Crown Estate were aware of on the river included:
        - Silting
        - Loss of saltmarsh
        - Erosion around Bawdsey Manor
        - Water quality
        - Abandoned boats
        - Speeding/jet skis
    - River safety was highlighted as a key priority for the Crown Estate with deep dive and gaps analysis underway across their portfolio.
    - A number of pilot projects being supported by the Crown Estate were highlighted as showing great success and potential to be replicated elsewhere. Such as:
        - The Lymington Saltmarsh Restoration pilot project on the Solent.
        - North Devon Biosphere – Catchment to Coast Pilot. Integrated landscape approach.
        - Castle Pill, Pembrokeshire – removing abandoned boats. Significant issue across the Crown Estate portfolio. Looking to work with local communities to deal with repeat offenders.
- Following the presentation, there was an opportunity for Q&A whereby the following was discussed:
    - Concern about Environment Agency (EA) monitoring of mudflats with hovercrafts. Crown Estate thanked the raising of the concern and would discuss with the EA at their upcoming coordination meeting.
    - There is a Coastal Stewardship Fund with up to £20k for individual grants available - details will be made available at an RDA/Crown Estate follow-up meeting. Marine nature team have a bigger budget that it may be possible to access.
    - It was acknowledged that parts of the Crown Estate's portfolio were expanding from sediment deposits whereas as other land owners were losing land due to coastal erosion. A question was asked whether any compensation schemes were under consideration to which it was

confirmed that they were not. It was confirmed that HM Treasury make decisions on distribution of Crown Estate revenues and the EA is tasked with coastal protection.

- The use of dredgings was discussed. Woodbridge Boatyard highlighted lack of engagement from Suffolk Council and EA on exploring more beneficial places to place dredgings. Crown Estate highlighted importance of a whole river plan.

  Action agreed: Request to Crown Estate to use its influence to improve relationships with EA – especially regarding its use of disruptive hovercraft to survey saltings.

- Question asked whether there has ever been discussion of a statutory river authority. Crown Estate highlighted that it would give greater powers to establish speed controls and come up with combined river plans.
- It was clarified that the Crown Estate land ownership map is available for all to view online (link).
- It was explained that the Crown Estate has no statutory duty to maintain the coast in any particular way. So Crown Estate will not impose plans but will support local groups in developing them.
- Multiple complaints were made about dealings with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), to which the Crown Estate empathised and said they had faced similar issues and they will continue to engage with and lobby for improvements on the issues raised.

  Action agreed: Jenny Riddell-Carpenter to talk with MMO.

- A question about the position of the channel markers at the river mouth was raised to which it was clarified that that is the responsibility of Trinity House and not the Crown Estate. It was explained that Trinity House will only move markers on an annual basis.

Further Group Discussion

Following the conclusion of the Crown Estate presentation and Q&A Colin Nicholson invited all representatives present to introduce themselves, their organisation and to highlight items of interest/seen as issues. The key themes of the discussion centred around the following:

- Safety
  - Safety of river users was a repeated concern raised, particularly given the increased numbers of swimmers and users of non-traditional craft (inflatables). In particular, how to keep people out of the channel where they are very difficult to spot from boats. Concern was also raised about young children swimming at Bawdsey Quay without close enough adult supervision given the strength of the tide there.
  - The informal advice given by the Harbour Masters and other experienced river users was recognised as a powerful tool of community engagement. A number of suggestions were made on other volunteers that could be mobilised to support public information campaigns around river safety including Coastguard teams and National Landscapes volunteers. From September it is going to be compulsory to teach water safety in schools and it was suggested there may be something this group could do to support local schools (Felixstowe Lifeboats already receiving requests for teaching input).
  - Potential ideas for signage and other communications were raised including leveraging materials produced by the RNLI. The existing RDA one-pager on river swimming was

commended but it was suggested something simpler could be more effective. It was suggested that collecting data on incidents could be very powerful for informing public. Wildlife Wise suggested they may have some funding available to support public safety messaging where there is a human element to wildlife conservation.

- Dredgings
    - Building on from the discussion on dredging during the Crown Estate presentation a number of representatives expressed their interest and support for a river-wide plan. In particular, how to support the preservation and restoration of saltmarsh habitat. The RDA offered to follow up with the Harwich Haven Authority to see what lessons could be learned from the major project underway on the Orwell and Stour.
- Other
    - Concerns about water quality raised on behalf of a number of the representatives. How better communications can be coordinated was discussed.
    - The need for an exemption for the commercial testing of engines was raised as being necessary for revision of the river's byelaws (speed limits).
    - The need for a new Chair of the Deben Estuary Partnership was highlighted.
    - The Crown Estate representatives raised the question of abandoned boats. Where the owner cannot be traced the responsibility may fall on the Fairway committees (as navigation authorities) or the Environment Agency (if there is pollution) or the riparian owner if the boats are above the tide line. In other areas the Crown Estate has been able to facilitate action as they can influence other authorities through collaboration.
    - In Colin Nicholson's experience, East Suffolk Council had little idea of the problems of the river, its Coastal Management Team's responsibility ending at Bawdsey/Felixstowe Ferry as Estuaries are considered transitional waters. He hoped perhaps the Crown Estate might help to encourage East Suffolk Council to take more interest. Currently East Suffolk Council has no experience with estuary management although there are at least three rivers in its area.

      Action agreed: To have a proper conversation with East Suffolk Council regarding estuary management. Note this is shortly to be a unitary authority.

      Questions to be considered: Is the system of Fairway committees working well? Is there anything to be gained from establishing a statutory harbour authority for the Deben?

Annex 1 – Deben Forum 2026 Attendees

Boatyards	
Deben Boatyard	Sam and Kayleigh Whitworth
Melton Boatyard	Simon Skeet/Cate Meadows
Robertson's Boatyard	Matt/James Eminson
Woodbridge and Waldringfield Boatyard	Matt Lis
Other Businesses/Organisations	
Deben Cruises (01473 736 260)	Matt Lis
HMS Vale	Cate Meadows
Sutton Hoo Ship's Company and the Sæfyrd (Ships' Co. rowing club)	Jacq Barnard; David Keeble
Shipwrights Yard Ltd, Waldringfield / Deben Dinghy Co	Mark (and Emma) Barton
Fairway Committees:	
Waldringfield	John Smith
Clubs and Associations:	
Bawdsey Haven Yacht Club	Barry Paul
Bawdsey Haven Yacht Club	Jim Wyllie
Deben Paddlers	Neil Boast
Waldringfield Sailing Club	Tony Lyon
Woodbridge Coastal Rowing Club	Jacq Barnard
Woodbridge Cruising Club	Mark Richardson (past commodore)
Harbour Masters	
Waldringfield	Tony Lyon
Landowners	
Crown Estate	Peter Riches
Crown Estate	Emily Swift
Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Andrew Excell
Further Forum Participants	

RDA	Colin Nicholson
Deben Estuary Partnership	Dee McLeavy
Deben Estuary Partnership	Oscar Hayter
Felixstowe Lifeboat	Marie Worley (Chair); Darren Suttonwood;
Wildlife Wise	Sam Kench; Will Dowe

Representation

MP for Suffolk Coastal	Jenny Riddell-Carpenter
East Suffolk Council - Coastal Management	Mark Packard

RDA Support

Phil Skinner

Julia Jones

Anna-Marie Sellon

Liz Hatton

Sue Orme