

Gazette Letters 14/10/06

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Solutions must be specific to the site

GRAHAM Axell, your 'back to nature' correspondent has got it all wrong. Re-flooding ancient flood plains is the cheapest way? He has got to be joking. The fact that many flood plains are heavily developed has obviously passed him by. Re-flooding flood plains would, it is true, accommodate a lot of ducks and other wildlife, but the residents of the huge areas of flood plain on which large parts of London are built may not be very happy about it. The Thames Barrier stops the tube being flooded. That would take a few years to pump out. Think of the cost of that Mr Axell. More locally, Environment Agency plans to flood the Cuckmere Valley are flawed. Engineers report that these plans could cause more flooding upstream in Alfriston putting lives and property at risk but don't worry, there are not nearly so many lives or such expensive property at risk as in London. Where do you draw the line Mr Axell? What and whom do you save? And who are we to decide anyway? Of course, we could blitz Alfriston and London, direct corollaries of what you are putting forward. Costly? Just a bit! So much for your cost argument. We are told sea levels are rising but there is disagreement between experts. Some say the ozone layer is mending, some say our worry should not be flooding but the movement of the Gulf Stream north and a freezing Labradorian climate, some say the sea rise is 3.5mm pa and some 6mm, some say lots of things. The truth is that we do not really know at this point what is going to happen, not enough to make the sort of judgements that EA and EN are making in our name followed with doe-eyed devotion by the likes of Mr Axell. We need to buy time so we can know more. The local community plan for the Cuckmere - to raise the banks by only one ft - does just that. It gives 50 years of the status quo. This solution is supported by local people (98 per cent in a recent survey), by local parish and town councils and Wealden and Lewes District Councils. Common sense at last. The Quangos' Cuckmere proposals will decimate the tourist industry by destroying four well used and loved footpaths and replacing fields with mud flats, not known for their tourist attraction. This will cause many redundancies and huge costs to other government departments for the minimal saving by EA of £30,000 annual maintenance. When questioned EA officials said that was not their problem ... Mr Axell refers to wildlife habitat.

There is an eco-structure in the Cuckmere Valley now including many important species detailed in the ecologists' Bible - the Red Data Book. Yet EA and surprisingly English Nature, that 'great protector of wildlife', wish to commit 'ethnic cleansing' in order to generate another eco-structure which may or may not work notwithstanding the 'precautionary principle' they are mandated to follow in their own manuals and EU directives. This says, in layman's terms, 'if it's not broke don't fix it'. The only sensible approach to all of this is to look carefully at the site conditions - there is a truly laudable Environment Agency project at Abbots Hall Farm in Suffolk. But to try and fit that solution to the Cuckmere is ridiculous - an M&S suit to fit all shapes and sizes. Solutions must be specific to the site so as to be 'reasonable' in terms of costs and effect and all costs must be taken into account not just those the EA and EN choose to count so that the net cost to the public purse is reduced not increased by burdens that one government department's plans place on another. Local councillors have met with a director of the National Audit Office who is investigating the current high level of expenditure on the Cuckmere EA and EN scheme which, more than likely with government cuts involving DEFRA and the EA, will be abortive. In the same breath as spending circa £500,000 only on reports for the Cuckmere Project, EA pleads poverty in dealing with Lewes and Uckfield flood defences where so much damage was visited in 2000. We are now six years on. We, you and I Mr Axell, should ask residents of Lewes and Uckfield if they are satisfied with the work the EA has done and the level of expenditure on their real problems. Planning inquiries which will cost the EA a cool £500,000 a time yet questions on such expenditure is met with the bureaucratic version of shrugged shoulders by EA official. Grrr: Bring back the village stocks, I say. Please visit www.rescuecuckmerevalley.com to learn more and sign the on-line petition. - ALAN EDGAR, Dane Road, Seaford

Beach is swept away by longshore drift

I AM activated by the remarks of Andrew Gillham, flood manager for the EA in 'Beach is too Steep for People to enjoy' in the Seaford Gazette of September 13. He stated that massive improvements were made to the Seaford beach in 1987, this is almost true. The problem was that they did not finish the job. It cost £9million to put the beach there, but they did not secure it with groynes. The result is that £5million of it has been swept away by the longshore drift, clogging up the Cuckmere on the way. Because of the longshore drift the beach has to be replenished at least twice a year. The Freedom of Information Act allowed me to ask how much it was costing. I was told £180,000 per annum. I was tempted to say 'pull the other one'. Even so replenishment at that price has cost more than £3million and without groynes the cost will go on mounting eventually passing the original £9million. The beach will get steeper, unless for anything except flood protection, whereas the area around Tidemills will get weaker as they remove shingle along to Seaford. The traditional British enjoyment of the seaside may mean nothing to Mr Gillham. However, one would have thought someone working for the environment would realise the increasing value of holidays at home, in a world becoming increasingly aware that flying is bad for the environment. - GUY MACDONNELL, Seaford.

Canadian soldiers remembered

CANADIAN soldiers who lost their lives at Seaford Head are to be honoured with a plaque overlooking the valley. The memorial will also honour Corporal Leslie Edwards, a local man who tried in vain to save the soldiers' lives during World War II. Cpl Edwards was serving in the area and warned the commanding officer against camping his troops in the field overlooking the Cuckmere Valley. Cpl Edwards told him German bombers regularly used the valley for navigational purposes. The officer took no action leading to the death of all the young soldiers and himself. The officer, who was shaving in the middle Coastguard Cottage, died instantly when a shell went through the wall that held his mirror. Every Remembrance Day, until his death in 2004, Cpl Edwards would lay poppies on the site the soldiers died. The plaque is being commissioned by the South Downs Joint Committee on behalf of the Seaford Head Nature Reserve management committee. It is hoped the plaque, which will be sited nearby the Coastguard Cottages, will be installed in time for Remembrance Day next month.