

# Public enquiry is requested over Cuckmere plans

**THE saving of the River Cuckmere has been stopped in its tracks after the Environment Agency called for a public enquiry.**

The EA has written to the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) to ask for the Secretary of State to call in the planning application to raise the banks of the Cuckmere estuary.

Last month, Wealden District Council and Lewes District Council granted planning permission to multi-millionaire publisher Nigel Newton for a scheme to raise the banks of the estuary.

English Nature, the Environment Agency and the South Downs Joint Committee objected to the proposal.

They had submitted a rival application where one of the options was to allow the valley to flood.

If the EA's request is granted, a public inquiry will hear evidence from all interested parties.

Dr Chris Edwards, English Nature's area manager for Sussex and Surrey said, "English Nature has requested a call-in on a number of grounds.

"Raising the river banks could jeopardise the development of a more natural and self-sustaining estuary, one that works with nature to meet the challenges of rising sea levels.

"In addition to this, the application does not have an Environmental Impact Assessment - and we are concerned that the proposals could result in long term damage to this Site of Special Scientific Interest."

Rupert Clubb, Environment Agency Sussex area manager, said, "We have concerns about a scheme that proposes to raise the banks of the Cuckmere estuary because it constrains natural processes.

"The Flood Risk Assessment with this application was also inadequate.

by Hannah Russell

"It remains unclear whether raising the banks would cause increased flood risk elsewhere and there is also the consideration that flood risks may be accelerated as a result of climate change.

"We were surprised that, given these risks and uncertainties, planning approval was given to this scheme."

Alan Edgar, Nigel Newton's planning advisor, said he found it 'absolutely astonishing'.

He said, "Ours is a very insignificant application. It is maintenance - it is work which, if the environment agency was doing it, would not require planning permission.

"It would be permitted development.

"Here are two principal government agencies asking for an application to be called in for this insignificant works.

Seaford town councillor Bob Brown, who supported Mr Newton's application, said, "I am disappointed but not surprised at this decision.

"It inevitably will delay the whole issue of whether the flooding will take place or not and it seems to me unfortunate that a national body is appearing to obstruct a local initiative."

MP Norman Baker said, "If this means that all the options for the valley are to be properly and independently examined, then I welcome this.

"But this call-in procedure must not be used simply to look at the approved plans without looking at the Environment Agency's alternative scheme.

"The fact is that there is considerable disquiet about the Environment Agency's plans from elected representatives at all levels and it is imperative that these plans are subject to proper, rigorous and independent assessment before any decision can be taken to implement them."