

Trust favours public inquiry for Cuckmere

THE National Trust is welcoming the idea of a formal public inquiry on the future of Cuckmere Haven.

It believes an inquiry would provide the chance to examine the various coastal management schemes currently promoted, with the aim of arriving at a long-term plan for the future management of the estuary.

The necessary steps required to deliver that plan could then be implemented through a partnership of local stakeholders, landowners and national agencies.

A spokesman said: 'Our coastal policy aims to work with natural processes, wherever possible, so as to make space for coastal change and adaptation of features.'

'Our coastlines are dynamic features that are created and maintained by natural processes; for example, the chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters are kept white through erosion.'

'We recognise that coastal

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change is a highly emotive issue.

'Opinion is mixed but we believe there is strong evidence that the south coast faces change due to sea level rise (up to 1 metre by 2100) and a projected increase in the strength of storms and wave energy.'

'In addition, on the Cuckmere Estuary the meanders are silting up and will be lost over time, the beach is eroding and the river walls and flood banks are coming to the end of their useful life'

'At Cuckmere, therefore, no change is not an option.'

'The Trust favours a scheme which will restore a naturally functioning estuary.'

Reacting to the possibility of a public inquiry, Lewes MP Norman Baker said: 'If this means all the options are properly and independently examined, then I wel-

come it.'

'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 assessment before any decision can be taken.'

Eastbourne MP Nigel Waterson has also welcomed the news.

He said: 'This is something I have long campaigned for, alongside local people.'

'The view of the Environment Agency and other quangoes that nature should be allowed to take its course needs to be tested properly in a public forum.'

'More than 400,000 people visit this unique coastline every year, and to destroy it without proper public debate would be tantamount to vandalism.'