

Both sides of dispute over beauty spot's future aired

FOR

PLANNING expert Alan Edgar, former landlord at the Golden Galleon pub which overlooks the valley, is representing residents. He compiled the planning application, recently approved by Lewes and Wealden District Councils, to raise the river banks by 30cm.

THROUGH five decades of perspective, I have perhaps a rather romantic view of the time in the schoolyard when I took on the class bullies and won.

It is with this in mind that I look with sadness at the efforts of the Government quangos seeking to brow-beat into submission the communities of Cuckmere and Seaford.

The Environment Agency is the lead proponent of a plan to scupper our plan for raising the Cuckmere river banks by 30cm against the rise of sea levels.

This is a mature, non-invasive plan, well conceived with engineering and ecological advice of specialists to give 50 years' life to the valley as it is at present.

Why would we want to do this?

To protect not destroy, to provide 50 years life for the existing eco-structure, to give time to excavate important archaeology known to exist and, perhaps even more importantly, to protect the existing landscape and four public rights of way including long distance designations, the Round Britain Walk, The South Downs Way and the Vanguard Way, which are the whole basis of the existing tourist industry, local economy and employment.

The Environment Agency

PICTURE: LIZ FINLAYSON

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AGAINST

RUPERT Clubb is Sussex area manager for the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency, National Trust, English Nature and the South Downs Joint Committee recently asked the Government to call in the planning decision to raise the river banks.

THE biggest battle is actually against climate change. At some point we need to come to some shared understanding of what is best for the future of the Cuckmere Estuary.

It is a fantastic location, no one would dispute that. It is part of the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part of the Sussex Heritage Coast and every year about 350,000 people come to visit it.

What is interesting is those people probably don't realise it is actually a man-made landscape.

It has been shaped and managed, in the past and up until now, by engineering works, flood defences, agriculture and navigation.

When you are actually down in the valley bottom you can't see that. When you get up on the Downs you can see how man-made it is.

These flood banks and structures along its present route are approaching the end of their useful life and they will collapse. There is a lack of urban development in the estuary. There are no houses at risk of flooding south of the A259.

The changes that have taken place in agriculture and navigation mean we have to question whether we should continue to maintain the estuary in the same way.