

Row over cash spent on valley flood plans

THE RESULTS of a Government investigation into the amount spent on controversial plans to flood a beauty spot could be published imminently.

The National Audit Office has been inspecting how the Environment Agency spent £440,000 on proposals to flood Cuckmere estuary, near Seaford.

The proposal, for the

western side of the Cuckmere Valley, has been dogged by controversy for more than two years.

Supporters, which include English Nature and the National Trust, hope the work will create a vast wildlife refuge of salt marsh and mudflats.

Opponents fear meadows will be replaced by tidal mud, altering the picture postcard view.

Alan Williams MP,

chairman of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, said the agency would "try to produce the report within the next couple of weeks".

In response to a question in the Commons from Lewes MP Norman Baker, Mr Williams said the audit office had reviewed Environment Agency papers, talked to the agency's staff and interviewed interested parties. It was now con-

sidering its response.

Mr Baker said: "I am extremely concerned the Environment Agency has already spent almost half a million pounds on the proposals for this controversial project - a huge sum of money before they have even agreed to the public inquiry that their plans should result in.

"Even expert opinion is split over the need and desirability of the project."