

**Secretary to the Forum**

(01243) 753542 (Direct)  
(01243) 777952 (Fax)  
fiona.macleod@westsussex.gov.uk  
www.westsussex.gov.uk

County Hall  
West Street  
Chichester  
West Sussex  
PO19 1RQ  
01243 777100

If calling ask for

Our reference

Fiona MacLeod

The Environment Agency  
Saxon House  
Little High Street  
Worthing  
West Sussex BN11 1DH

19<sup>th</sup> March 2007

Dear Sirs

**Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy 2007**

Please accept this letter as the response to your consultation paper from the Coastal Plain sub forum on behalf of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex – a statutory body created by the government to advise the County Council and others on matters relating to public access to the countryside.

The context of the study is explained in your introduction where you refer to permissive powers to “construct coastal defences to protect people and property where these are economically justified...” You also refer to the EA’s obligation to protect habitats.

However, the public interest is wider and, as you might expect, we are surprised that little attention is paid to the importance of public coastal access. This is particularly ironic as the government are about to consult widely as to how coastal access should be improved. We believe that the EA and the two District Councils do have responsibilities for public access and leisure. Accordingly, we feel that built into the strategy should be an objective to take advantage of any significant changes along the coast to protect and actually improve public access as necessary.

We offer the following comments on the three sections:

1. Pagham Beach, Pagham Harbour and Church Norton – We support the proposed holding the line which will protect the valuable shingle flora and an area of great importance for public access and nature conservation.
2. Selsey and Medmerry – It seems to us to be incongruous to hold the line at East and West Beaches and yet to allow the central vulnerable section to erode, in particular as the collapse of the central defences would threaten the valued continuous coastal public access. At Medmerry we recognise that the track along the top of the beach is not technically a public right of way, despite the fact that it has been used by the public for many years; the loss of this vital direct link between Selsey and East Wittering we deplore and hope can be reconsidered. If not, then it is

essential that advantage is taken of the erection of the new inland banks to create new public rights of way to link the two communities. We are also concerned that the abandonment of the present regime at Medmerry will have a detrimental impact on the drainage of the farmland and a number of footpaths will become unusable.

3. East Wittering, Cakeham and West Wittering – We found your prescription regarding East Head both worrying and confusing. We were worried at the potential loss of regular public access to East Head – surely one of the most popular coastal sites for visitors in the entire county? We are confused because you basically favour natural solutions and yet want to accelerate those changes by removing existing defences. Our understanding is that the position at East Head seems to be relatively stable with some accretion of sand and sediment and we would caution against taking steps which may be to everyone's detriment.

Finally, I shall be grateful if you will note the Forum's interest in access matters and add us to your list of consultees when addressing the next stretch of coastline in West Sussex.

Yours faithfully

Fiona MacLeod  
Secretary  
Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

CC Louise Goldsmith, WSCC Cabinet Member, Environment & Economy