

Sussex Ouse Restoration Trust (SORT) Proposal to reinstate navigation to the River Ouse

July 2007

Introduction

Sussex Ouse Restoration Trust (SORT) propose to reinstate navigation, including canal boat access to the River Ouse by replacing lock structures along the length of the river and installing a tidal barrage south of Lewes.

The purpose of this briefing is to explain our role as the Environment Agency and set out current position on the SORT proposals based on the information in their document 'The Sussex Ouse: A vision for the 21st Century'.

Our Role

Before SORT can start the process of reinstating navigation to the River Ouse they will need to obtain permissions from us, and others. Impounding licences are needed for each in-channel structure, and land drainage consent for any structure in, on or near to the river.

Impounding licence

We have a duty to ensure that any in-stream structures do not adversely affect flows, the environment or impact on other users. An impounding licence is required for works that impound, obstruct or impede the flow of an inland water, such as a dam, lock or weir.

Land Drainage Consent

It is our duty to ensure that any works or structures in, on or near a watercourse do not increase flood risk, interfere with our own flood defence infrastructure or adversely affect the environment of a watercourse. Works would include the in-stream structures as well as slipways, moorings and bank works.

Fish and Eel / Elver passes

It is our job to ensure that in-stream structures do not adversely affect fish passage up and down stream. New structures require fish passes under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 and fish pass designs need our approval before they are installed.

Water Framework Directive

We are the principal protector of the water environment and the primary authority for implementing the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in England and Wales. Under the WFD we have an obligation to improve the ecological and chemical health of the River Ouse and prevent further deterioration. We must consider any works that could affect the overall health of the river within the context of the WFD.

Our position

We support a vision for rivers, lakes and coastal waters to be cleaner and richer in wildlife, and to naturalise watercourses and manage them in a sustainable way. The modification required to restore navigation to the Ouse will adversely affect the ecological and chemical health of the river. For us to support the scheme we would need to be certain that there will be no adverse environmental impacts to the Ouse.

We have a presumption against in-stream structures as they will alter the behaviour of a river, affecting flood risk, wildlife, water quality and other users. The SORT scheme as proposed would impact on other users of the river, including a South East Water public water abstraction, and it would disturb habitat and affect fish movement up and down stream. Without accurate flood modelling we would hold concerns over increased flood risk caused by the introduction of new in-stream structures. An application to introduce structures to the river as a part of the SORT vision would be likely to be refused as the vision stands at present.

We are committed to improving and extending wetland habitats in Sussex and preventing the permanent loss of these habitats through gradual development. The proposed navigation route passes through a number of local and nationally designated areas of valuable habitat. We would seek to protect these areas in consultation with Natural England and other relevant bodies.

We have considered the proposals set out in the 'vision' document alongside our policies. We believe overall the scheme will be detrimental to the environment of the River Ouse, and do not see it as the most sustainable way of managing the River in the longer term. We therefore cannot support the project in its current form.

Contact:

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Non-EA permissions SORT will require:

Riparian owners, Millers rights, planning permission for structures, Environment Impact Assessment (Under schedule 2 of the EIA Regs) for scheme, Natural England assent for works affecting designated sites,

Further consultees & interest groups:

Natural England, Sussex Otter and Rivers Partnership, Sussex Environmental Partnership, East Sussex County Council, all Local Authorities that border or would be affected by the project, Sussex Ouse Conservation Society, Sussex Sea Fisheries, South East Water, Newhaven Port Authority, Angling Clubs - Ouse Angling Preservation (day tickets at Barcombe), Copthorne and District Angling Society (Newick to Barcombe), Haywards Heath and District Angling Society (Lindfield to Goldbridge at Newick)

Other Considerations:

New bridges on the Ouse – Bridge heights?
FEPA Licence for Barrage?