



## ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Norfolk & Suffolk Area Environment Group - Second Annual Report April 98 - March 99

# Chairman's Preface



To the Members of the AEG, who bring such a wide range of knowledge and expertise, I record my sincere thanks. Their input, together with that of the staff of the Environment Agency, should inspire confidence in the production of Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) in particular. Expectations need to be realisable, however, and it is here that the careful scrutiny of the AEG members ensures that such expectations are achievable.

During this year, communications between the AEG and the Agency have improved with the formation of a Communications Sub-group. Partnership with other agencies in Eastern Area is important in raising awareness of the Agency's activities across its wide range of responsibilities.

The Broadland Rivers LEAP has progressed through to public consultation on the Draft document and is due to be launched later this year.

Sheila Ashford  
Chairman

# AEG Membership

Name	Affiliation	Sub-Groups	
Mrs S ASHFORD	Broads Authority	Broadland Rivers	Mrs S Ashford
Cllr P BALDWIN	Norfolk County Council		Mr J Brown
Mr S BOLT	Anglian Water Services		Mr T Jolly
Mr J BROWN	Broads Boat Hire Federation		Mr S Bolt
Cllr Mrs R CARTER	Waveney District Council		Mr T Preston
Mr H G CATOR	Norfolk & Suffolk Local Flood Defence Committee (until October 1998)		Ms J Ward
Mr R E CLEMENTS	ICI Paints		Mr HG Cator
Dr M GREEN	Broads Authority (from October 1998)	North Norfolk	Dr M Green
Mr T G JOLLEY	Rhone-Poulenc		Dr I Shepherd
Professor J N LESTER	Imperial College, London		Mrs S Ashford
Cllr Mrs V MASON	Suffolk Coastal District Council		Prof J Lester
Mr C PALMER	Suffolk Waste Disposal (until August 1998)	East Suffolk	Mr G Ralli
Mr P D PAPWORTH	Norfolk & Suffolk Local Flood Defence Committee (from February 1999)		Cllr P Baldwin
Mr K PETTICAN	Regional Fisheries, Ecology & Recreation Advisory Committee	Communications	Dr I Shepherd
Mr T A PRESTON	Framlingham Farmers/Farmer Co-operative		Mr S Ashford
Mr T PRYKE	Angling interests (from July 1998)		Dr I Shepherd
Mr G RALLI	Country Landowners' Association		Cllr Mrs V Mason
Mr J ROUGHTON	Suffolk Wildlife Trust		Mr T Preston
Dr I SHEPHERD	Council for the Protection of Rural England		Mrs S Ashford
Mr G R STEELE	Port of Felixstowe		Dr I Shepherd
Ms J WARD	English Nature		Cllr Mrs V Mason
			Mr J Roughton

Four business meetings were held during the year, in April, July, October and February 1999. An annual site visit took place in June 1998.

## AEG Key Considerations during the Year

A wide range of subjects and issues were considered (see Appendix) many of which related to the Agency's 10 Point Action Plan. In addition to LEAPs, those topics giving rise to particular debate by members included Water Use and Re-use (surface and waste water), Sustainable Urban Drainage, Consultation on Water Companies Asset Management Plans (AMP3), Mercury Contaminated Sediment in the River Yare Norfolk, Disposal of Sewage Sludge, and the Value of a Multi-disciplinary and Partnership Approach to Environmental Enhancement.

Water use and re-use (surface and waste water), this topic was debated at a number of meetings following a presentation about the Agency's Drought Management Strategy. Co-incidentally, following production of the Strategy parts of central and eastern England experienced the wettest April (1998) this century which resulted in widespread flooding. At earlier meetings Members had expressed concern about low groundwater levels in the area. Although these levels had recovered in the Norfolk chalk recovery of levels in the Suffolk aquifers was much slower. The Chairman and some Members advised that planning committees of local authorities should be made aware of pollution prevention measures which take account of rapid run-off of water from pavements, car parks and tarmac. In addition Members considered that the implications of climate change brought a particular focus to the subject of water availability in the Eastern Area. Members advised the Agency that local authorities were endeavouring to get wider household use of water butts both in existing housing and as part of new housing developments. Officers described liaison with developers of the former Ipswich airfield site where it is proposed to install grey water systems in all new houses. Members advised that the Agency should be particularly aware of the likelihood of availability of water becoming the controlling influence on development in parts of the Eastern Area.

The availability of water resources to meet the needs of population growth was also discussed in connection with the Suffolk County Structure Plan. Some Members expressed the view that whilst the Agency and Water Companies appeared confident that water supplies would be available there was however no transparent process to show the basis for this confidence.

These themes were expanded in other meetings to cover the related subject of Sustainable Urban Drainage. Members received a copy of the Agency's Environmental Good Practice Guide on this topic that had also been distributed to relevant managers in all local planning authorities. The Guide includes a comparison of conventional urban drainage systems and sustainable approaches designed to promote infiltration, reduced run-offs speed and promotion of natural ways of treating run-off prior to reaching water courses. Members advised that local planning authority members should be made aware of this initiative and that the Agency should consider approaching local authority members directly.

Members had a number of opportunities to contribute to the AMP3 Consultation and to receive feedback from officers. This included awareness of the Water Companies' submission (The Cost

of Quality) and the Agency's advice to the Secretary of State (A Price Worth Paying). In addition Members discussed a summary of the Agency's consultation on priorities for investment by water companies in environmental improvement as part of the AMP3 process (Responses to : Outlook for the Environment). Officers pointed out that of 160 replies received by the Agency nationally, 14 had come from Members of the Norfolk and Suffolk and the Essex Area Environment Groups. Responses to the consultation indicated a wish to see a wide range of environmental improvements. Highest amongst these nationally were those dealing with water leakage, wetlands and river water quality; responses from AEG Members had reflected these outcomes. The eventual outcome from DETR supporting environmental initiatives was particularly pleasing for Members.

The disposal of Mercury Contaminated Sediment in the River Yare was also the subject of discussion throughout the year. Members with an involvement in Broadland contributed to discussions regarding options for the disposal of this contaminated material that may be necessary to maintain and improve navigation. Officers made presentations regarding the risk based criteria which had been developed for disposal of the material. The issues of particular interest were centred around improved navigation and hence the local economy, and risks involved in the disposal of potentially toxic material. Members emphasised the importance and value of multi-disciplinary input to this debate and the benefits of a partnership approach to complex environmental issues such as this. Discussions on the Disposal of Sewage Sludge to Land were triggered by a presentation about the Government sponsored research and development project looking at the basis of the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 and the Code of Practice for the Agricultural Use of Sewage Sludge. Agriculture is the dominant land use in Norfolk and Suffolk and agricultural activities are closely related to environmental quality. Members also received Parliamentary reports on waste spreading on land and paper pulp spreading on agricultural land. Officers explained reasons for supporting the beneficial use of sewage sludge on agricultural land provided that this was carried out in a sustainable way, met the criteria for Best Practicable Environmental Option and - importantly - caused no harm to human health. Members expressed the view that this was an important and complex subject that included the role taken by supermarkets in dictating to farmers how their products should be grown. This is being accompanied by a growing refusal on the part of supermarkets to accept products grown on land treated with sewage sludge. It was important to ensure that the agricultural route for disposal of sludge in an environmentally sustainable way was not lost. A publicity campaign by the water companies may be required to change public perception and to accept that disposal on agricultural land was the natural way to dispose of the material if properly treated. As this subject had been excluded from the Agency's document Outlook for the Environment Members felt that the opportunity to include this should be pursued.

## Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs)

The relationship between expectation and the likely achievement of all actions identified by the LEAP process was raised by a number of Members. Concern was expressed about the risks of raising expectations unrealistically. Progress towards strengthening the link between LEAPs and business planning was highlighted. This included the need for the Agency to increase public awareness of financial issues and partnership opportunities to realise environmental gain.

### North Norfolk LEAP:

The first Annual Review of the Action Plan had been produced. Notable success through the year included production of the Biodiversity Action Plans in Norfolk. Much work had gone into managed retreat for Brancaster Marshes. This was closely linked to requirements arising from the Habitats Directive.

An environmental statement was produced for the protection of Cley and Salthouse marshes. Waste minimisation proposals had been progressed with business and industry. Anglian Water Services had undertaken a comprehensive sewage survey of Blakeney village. Priorities for ground water modelling were taken forward. Water Level Management Plans had been completed for North Norfolk sites and agreed with English Nature.

### Broadland Rivers LEAP (formerly Yare LEAP):

Following a well attended and successful pre-consultation meeting at Dunston Hall in July 1998, officers worked with the sub group to produce the Draft LEAP which was released in March 1999. Members of the sub group had drawn particular attention to the need for recreational and navigation information and issues within the report.

Officers were also working with Norfolk County Council to produce an Environmental Overview for the whole of the county. This will be published in June 1999.

### East Suffolk LEAP:

The first annual review of the Action Plan is due for publication by June 1999. Notable achievements against the Action Plan to date include:



- ◆ The completion of the action to undertake hydrological (flow monitoring) and ecological surveys to research the environmental needs and help formulate a long term Action Plan for rivers.
  - ◆ A new gauging station is being planned to improve flow and level measurement on the River Deben to provide data to enable the Agency to operate the augmentation scheme in an optimum way.
  - ◆ A water control structure has been completed as per the Water Level Management Plan recommendations at Easton Valley. New management proposals are being investigated at Potters Bridge Sluice.
- ◆ The development and implementation of the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan.

# Annual Site Visit – 24 June 1998

This included a boat trip on the River Ant and Barton Broad. Officers gave demonstrations of field techniques including taking core samples of the mud deposits in the Broad and techniques for sampling fish populations. After lunch the party, which included the Agency's Director of Operations and the Chief Executive of the Broads Authority, visited the Phillips site at the Bacton Gas Terminal.

# Forward Look

Awareness of the AEG and our role is increasing both within the Agency and with our partner organisations. In particular, we are endeavouring to enhance our "ambassadorial" role. Members of the AEG are becoming more involved with external contacts alongside Agency staff. The AEG recognises the value to be obtained from forging closer links between LEAP actions and business planning to ensure that resources are made available to realise the expectation generated by the LEAPs process. Members also recognise the constraints facing management that may act to limit progress on particular LEAP issues. Our new Area Manager, Hilary Aldridge, and her team are working with us to ensure that the valuable knowledge and experience Members bring to the AEG is used as effectively as possible.

## Appendix

### OTHER TOPICS DISCUSSED AND/OR RECEIVED

#### LEAPS

Expectation versus what can actually be achieved  
Revised National Guidelines for LEAPs

#### OTHER KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Review of the role of AEGs  
Sustainable Development  
Regional Development Agencies  
Suffolk County Structure Plan

#### OTHER SUBJECTS DISCUSSED

Ten Point Action Plan - the Local Context  
Waste Minimisation initiatives  
Lobby to make seawall signs on North Norfolk coast less intrusive  
Polluting effect of agricultural use of nitrates  
MoU with Great Yarmouth regarding oil spills  
The Waste Industry's view of the Environment Agency  
Area Manager's quarterly reports on functional activities  
Importance of cross-linkages with other regional committees  
Feedback from, and links to, other Agency committees  
Sulphur emissions and recovery at Bacton Gas Terminal  
Reduced licence charge for asbestos waste  
Drought Management Strategy  
Waste Arisings Survey  
DETR Review of Water Abstraction Licensing System - Agency Response  
Nitrate Vulnerable Zone Enforcement  
Habitats Directive - Review of Consents  
Rivers Deben, Alde/Ore and Blyth Estuarine Strategies  
Leachate from landfill sites

#### INFORMATION PAPERS RECEIVED

Consultation paper on Prosecution and Enforcement Policy  
The Environment Agency's National Education Strategy  
Regional Chambers and RDAs  
Agency videos

#### ITEMS REFERRED TO REGION

Disposal of sewage sludge to land and rapid rainfall run-off  
Re-educate public perception re sewage sludge to land and liaison with RDAs re sustainable development



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