

Mr C Sutton  
Lymington Society  
Buckland Manor  
Sway Road  
Lymington  
SO41 8NP

Our ref: WLM.02/09/HC/17

Date: 20 October 2009

Dear Mr Sutton

As a local stakeholder, I am writing to inform you of a scheme that the Environment Agency and Natural England will shortly be implementing on the Lymington River.

Natural England has identified that the Lymington River Reedbeds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located north of Bridge Road, Lymington are in a state of decline. High water levels at the site prevent access to the reedbeds for cutting, the result of which will be an increase in scrub. We conducted a review of the site in 2006 and concluded that there is no environmentally and economically sustainable option with which to reduce water levels across the reedbeds. Increasing tide levels, predicted as a consequence of sea level rise will continue to exacerbate the situation by reducing the time over each tidal cycle during which freshwater can discharge into the Lymington Estuary. Without any action the extent and quality of the reedbeds will continue to decline.

To improve the condition of the site, the Environment Agency and Natural England have developed a Water Level Management Plan, which sets out how water levels will be managed. Given that we are unable to maintain the reedbeds in situ, our alternative aspiration is the development of a more naturalised and dynamic system through the introduction of tidal water into the mainly freshwater habitat. We accept that this regulated tidal exchange may cause some reed loss. Whilst this will not be welcome with some residents, we believe the brackish and saline habitats that are created will be best for the future of the river.

To achieve our objective, in December 2009 we are planning to replace one of the tidal flaps on Bridge Road with a self-regulating tidegate as part of a two year reversible trial. The new structure has been designed to allow tidal water to pass through the causeway yet retains the ability to automatically close on high tides, preventing any increase in flood risk to properties upstream. Designed by the Environment Agency, this structure will be the first to be installed within the Southern Region.

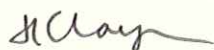
During the trial period we will undertake detailed monitoring of:

- ecological changes in the Lymington River Reedbeds SSSI
- velocities in the Lymington River
- velocities adjacent to the saltmarsh at the mouth of the Lymington estuary
- changes in water quality in the Lymington River upstream of Bridge Road.

This monitoring will provide information on the impacts of the scheme on habitats both up and downstream, and will be used following the trial to inform the longer-term management of the site.

Please find enclosed with this letter a newsletter providing further information on the scheme. However if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**HELEN CLAYTON**  
**Project Manager – Lymington River Reedbeds WLMP**

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## Lymington River Reedbeds SSSI Water Level Management Plan

### Introduction

The Lymington River Reedbeds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located north of Bridge Road in the Lymington River. This nationally important site is also part of the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA).

The reedbeds are in a poor ecological state and without action will continue to decline. To improve the condition of the site, a Water Level Management Plan has been devised to encourage a sustainable natural habitat and improve wellbeing in and around the Lymington River.

To achieve this vision within the Water Level Management Plan we have formed a partnership between the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

### What is a Water Level Management Plan?

Where water levels are important for the wellbeing of a SSSI, a Water Level Management Plan will recommend water levels based on the needs for conservation, flood defence and agriculture.

In the Lymington River Reedbeds SSSI levels of freshwater are too high to manage the reedbed successfully. This is due to sea level rise reducing the time during which freshwater can drain from the river.

Without any action this important habitat will continue to deteriorate. Our aspiration is to allow a more natural system to develop, including a degree of tidal inundation north of Bridge Road.

The aim is to re-establish intertidal habitats at the site which would support its current inclusion in the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area.

Natural England and the Environment Agency accept that with the introduction of regulated tidal exchange, some reed loss may occur. However, it is anticipated that this habitat will be replaced by brackish and saline habitats which are disappearing at other locations along the south coast.

These habitats themselves are more sustainable in this location in the long-term and compliment the designation of the site as part of the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area.



*Aerial view of the current tidal flap on Bridge Road*

## What next?

We have recently completed a feasibility study, which assesses and reviews the options available to achieve our aims.

You can read this report on the Hampshire & Isle of Wight website  
<http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/lymington-river-reedbed.html>

Following the outcomes of the feasibility study, we will be allowing some tidal water to pass upstream of Bridge Road as part of a two year reversible trial.

We will remove one of the tidal flaps and replace it with a structure that will remain open for most of the time.

This will allow tidal water to pass through the causeway, which it cannot currently do. It will also improve passage for important migratory fish such as sea trout. The structure will only close during extreme high tides for flood defence purposes.

We will also be improving the access to the tidal flaps to make it safer for Environment Agency operatives.

During the two year trial period we will carry out detailed monitoring of the following:

- ecological changes in the Lymington River Reedbeds SSSI
- velocities in the Lymington River
- velocities adjacent to the saltmarsh at the mouth of the Lymington estuary
- changes in water quality in the Lymington River upstream of Bridge Road.

Works to install the new structure are scheduled to take place during winter 2009/10.



*Self regulating tide gate*

## How can I find out more?

If you would like further information, contact:  
Helen Clayton on 08708 506506\* or e-mail [helen.clayton@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:helen.clayton@environment-agency.gov.uk)  
or  
James Walton on 08708 506506\* or e-mail [james.walton@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:james.walton@environment-agency.gov.uk)

You can also visit [www.hwt.org.uk](http://www.hwt.org.uk)

## In partnership with:

- Natural England
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

*\*Approximate call costs: 8p plus 6p per minute (standard landline). Please note charges will vary across telephone providers.*