

Eastern Yar River and Coastal Strategy making steady progress

Heidi Roberts, Project Manager, Senior Coastal Scientist, Atkins

With climate changing, sea levels rising and increased storminess, existing coastal and river flood defences are under greater threat.

In preparation the Environment Agency and Isle of Wight Council launched a strategy in January 2006 to set out how the risk of flooding, from the Eastern Yar River and Bembridge Harbour, and coastal erosion at St Helen's Duver will be managed over the next 100 years.

Work on the River and Coastal Strategy for the Eastern Yar is well underway. Over the last twelve months the Environment Agency, Isle of Wight Council and Atkins, the consultants commissioned to carry out initial investigations, have been working hard to complete the first phase of the strategy.

Work to date

Technical studies have been carried out to help identify the numerous river and coastal factors that are working within the valley and harbour and influencing everyday water flows.

From these studies the team is developing a complex computer model of the Eastern Yar Valley which will provide an understanding of how the flood waters move through the Valley and out into the Harbour. This is an essential tool that will be used to update the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps of the area and help inform those at risk of potential flooding.

The more views the merrier

As an issue that impacts the whole community the Environment Agency has been consulting key groups who are acting as public representatives throughout this first stage. This includes the St Helens and Bembridge Coastal and Harbour Working Group, Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association, RSPB, environmental, farming and landowner groups.

In addition workshops were held with the Isle of Wight Council, the Environment Agency and local groups to explore different options that could be used to manage flooding and coastal erosion in the valley and harbour.

These were a huge success with over sixty options identified. After reviewing, twenty-five are being taken forward as options that could significantly contribute to solving the flooding and coastal erosion problems.

To make use of all the good ideas suggested and the wider benefit they could have for the natural environment of the Eastern Yar Valley, those not taken forward are being brought together into a report. This will be available in the spring and it is anticipated that other groups will be able to implement these.

Looking ahead

The next and final phase of the strategy will involve more in depth studies of the options identified. This will identify solutions for :

- The river flooding around Sandown and Yaverland;
- The coastal erosion at St Helens Duver

Once the computer modelling for the Flood Risk Maps is complete in the spring, the models will be used to plan for the future implications of climate change and assess the most appropriate flood risk management solutions for the area.

The Team has also identified a number of small localised flooding problems around Wroxall and Whitwell. Solutions to these flooding problems will be submitted to the Environment Agency and the Isle of Wight Council in the spring.

All investigation work is expected to be complete in spring 2008. Consultation on the preferred solutions will take place in the autumn of 2007.