

South Efford Marsh: Summary of Revised Proposals, 8 November 2010

The Environment Agency has given further consideration to the works proposed for South Efford Marsh, Aveton Gifford. Should the project receive a suitable level of public support, further refinement will be required before proceeding to construction.

1. Inter-tidal habitat creation remains a high priority for Defra and the Environment Agency at a national level.
2. Habitat creation, rather than improvement or enhancement, remains the key objective.
3. Funding has been provided for inter-tidal habitat creation and, if no such work takes place, we are likely to have to sell South Efford Marsh on the open market.
4. We plan to use a regulated tidal exchange approach, rather than breach realignment. We plan to install a single self-regulating tide-gate (SRT) to replace the existing flapped outfall.
5. The SRT will be adjusted so that the marsh floods to a maximum level of 1.1m AOD. The SRT will also be adjusted so that the frequency of inundation is less than 250 per annum. This should cause an area of about 7ha to turn into saltmarsh over a period of about five years.
6. Restricting inundation in this way makes it much easier to ensure that flood risk is not increased. Our Development & Flood Risk team require that we take steps to reduce flood risk for South Efford Barns; we have identified simple measures to achieve this.
7. We also believe that the lower level will allow the sewage treatment facilities at South Efford Barns, Butterwell and South Efford House to continue to function properly.
8. In addition to the saltmarsh creation we plan to carry out works to improve the freshwater wetland habitat. We intend to create several small scrapes (maximum 500mm deep, shallow slopes, 15 to 20 metres across, scalloped edges) to encourage use by wading birds.
9. We wish to install a viewing platform or hide with space for eight people, located on the inner slope of the embankment in the northern corner of the marsh, with views both across the marsh and over the top of the bank onto the estuary.
10. Access to this point would be by a surfaced path (ideally allowing wheelchair access) running around the edge of the marsh and screened by existing trees / shrubs along the ditch line.
11. We will investigate the potential for other access paths, in particular to facilitate interpretation of saltmarsh habitat, but bearing in mind the need to avoid excessive disturbance.
12. We will provide a small number of car parking spaces for visitors, utilising the existing stock handling area.
13. We have had initial discussions with a number of potential partners regarding future management of the site. We anticipate that we would lease the site to the preferred partner, enabling them to seek agreements under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme.

14. In particular, our discussions with Devon Wildlife Trust have been most encouraging. DWT have an established Avon Valley Project, into which management of South Efford Marsh would fit well. We may need to adopt a competitive process before deciding on a preferred partner.
15. We anticipate that the site will continue to be grazed, with stock excluded from developing saltmarsh until it reaches a suitable stage. We would expect our partner to manage arrangements with a grazier.
16. We would remain responsible for managing flood risk and the SRT.
17. We want the site to be used for educational purposes as well as recreation. The Field Studies Council have expressed an interest in using South Efford Marsh for their studies. Gerd Masselink at Plymouth University has also indicated a desire to use the site for research.
18. We expect to include appropriate monitoring of the site as part of the project. This would include sedimentation and changes in flora and fauna, following established practice elsewhere.
19. In order to deliver the project by the end of March 2011 we need to make a decision on whether to proceed by the end of November.
20. An illustration of the anticipated outcome of the proposed project is attached separately.

Mike Williams
8 November 2010