



giving
nature
a home

Medmerry coastal realignment:

success for people
and wildlife





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Led by the Environment Agency in partnership with the RSPB, the multi-award-winning Medmerry scheme near Chichester is the largest managed realignment of the open coast ever undertaken in Europe. It's on the stretch of coast that was at greatest risk of coastal flooding in south east England.

The scheme and its objectives

The Medmerry scheme realigned a section of coast to deliver better protection from coastal flooding for local people and to provide intertidal habitat for nature. The scheme had three key objectives:

1 To provide sustainable flood risk management, giving greater protection to 360 properties in Selsey than previously possible, as well as protecting key infrastructure, including the main road and waste water treatment works.

2 To create compensatory intertidal habitat. About 183 hectares of mudflat, saltmarsh and transitional grassland is now in place.



The Medmerry reserve coastal realignment is likely to save taxpayers' money, as well as lessening flood risks.

3 To involve local communities, engaging them to help shape the project and play their part in the creation of the new public access routes and viewpoints for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. They also helped decide the line of the new bank. The area now benefits from a greater sense of place and identity than previously, and there are improved recreational facilities with health and educational benefits.

The RSPB facilitated the scheme by entering into the project 63 hectares of shingle and coastal grazing marsh at our Bracklesham reserve. This land was under threat from coastal surge.

What we've done

Between 2011 and 2013, the Environment Agency (EA), working in partnership with the RSPB and an array of contractors, built 7 km of new flood embankment on higher ground. In September 2013, the existing shingle defence was breached, creating intertidal habitat to

compensate for Natura 2000 losses elsewhere around the Solent. The site withstood the intensive gales which struck the south coast that winter: no additional flood risk management work was needed. The intertidal habitat developed quickly, with increasing populations of breeding and wintering wildfowl and wading birds, and a highlight was a pair of black-winged stilts successfully breeding in 2014.

There have been several major economic benefits as a direct result of the scheme. There have been vastly reduced ongoing maintenance costs of flood defences, as well as benefits to local businesses through what is a new green tourist attraction. In addition, Medmerry is already becoming a natural fish nursery to help sustain the local fishing fleet.

Conclusions

Medmerry has shown just how positive managed realignment can be for local people, wider society and wildlife. It's a win-win.

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The RSPB is a member of BirdLife International, a partnership of nature conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world.

