

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The suggested changes to the Cuckmere Valley to provide sustainable flood management within a more natural estuary will change the landscape and the present facilities enjoyed by visitors. However, if the change is properly managed there may be economic advantages to the area. This is predicted to arise because income lost from those visitors that choose not to visit Cuckmere because of the changes to the site following managed realignment may be more than compensated for by additional income from birdwatchers, with this being distributed more evenly throughout the year.

The two main areas of concern relate to the potential reduced access to the beach and loss of the concrete road, and the provision of new and/or different facilities must be very carefully considered as an integral part of the proposals. As the current beach is likely to change with the oscillations of the river mouth, it will be necessary to provide formal paths along both sides of the site to allow continued access and to encourage continued visitor usage of the site. The potential for a circular walk appears limited, but other facilities such as bird hides and picnic areas could be provided. The inclusion of tidal lagoons are likely to be an important feature to attract birdwatchers.

The Cuckmere Estuary and proposed changes are unique and it is therefore recommended that detailed visitor surveys are undertaken to obtain the views of existing and potential visitors. Specific questions should be asked regarding current and potential future use (including the main reason for visiting the site) and spend. Full descriptions of the changes together with photo montages, etc. should be used to ensure that there is a full an understanding as possible of what will be provided. While this will not provide data on the potential to attract new visitors to the site (particularly birdwatchers), it should provide a better basis for considering how many of the current visitors would choose to go elsewhere.

One way of identifying those people who may wish to visit Cuckmere could be to survey RSPB members. However, care is needed both when asking people what they intend to do (as it is often much easier to say you will visit somewhere than to actually go there!) and in interpreting the results.

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