



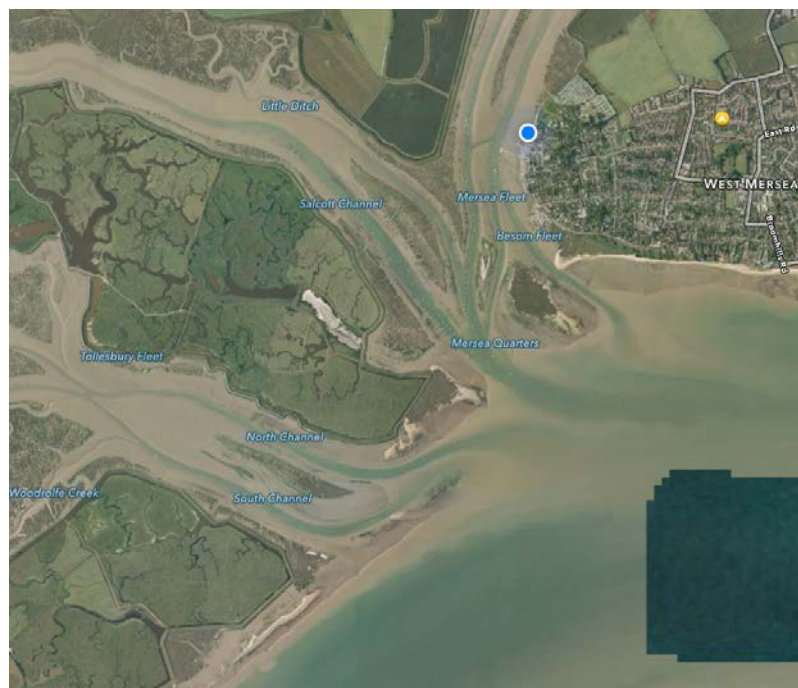
## Mersea Harbour Protection Trust.

Mersea Harbour is under serious threat from erosion by storm wave action. A combination of rising sea levels, global warming and changing weather patterns has already reduced the protection from the off-lying islands of Cobmarsh and Packing Marsh as well as Old Hall point. Within 20-30 years it could become unviable for moorings, oyster layings, wildlife habitat and many commercial and leisure marine activities. There will be severe loss of habitat for vulnerable birds including the rare Little Tern as well as many animal and plant species. The jetty is already dangerous in extreme conditions and could be lost within 10 – 20 years.

The answer is to re-inforce the seaward sides of Cobmarsh, Packing Marsh and Old Hall which have provided protection for the harbour and created the sheltered piece of water we all know and love by a “recharge” of suitable sand and shingle to build them up to a level above the highest storm waves. In the late 1990s the Environment Agency arranged to import a quantity of such material from dredging works in the approaches to Harwich Harbour. The exercise was a success and still provides a degree of protection although insufficient to provide long term security.

Local oysterman Alan Bird, who has worked on the water all his life, became very concerned about the future of the harbour and recognised the need for a new recharge to save our harbour for future generations. However since the Environment Agency can no longer fund such a project, it was clear that it must be undertaken as a community project. So he put a small group together to form The Mersea Harbour Protection Trust as a charity to arrange a new recharge, reinforcing the protecting islands and headland with around 1700,000 tons of suitable sand and gravel from a new planned dredging programme off Harwich Harbour.

An additional benefit of the recharge is that it will provide additional habitat for the rare Little Tern, which nest on increasingly scarce isolated shingle beaches.



Before the recharge can go ahead, approval must be obtained from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Natural England (NE) and other bodies. This requires a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment with surveys of topography, birdlife, marine life, invertebrates, tides etc . With assistance from specialist consultants, the RSPB and Essex Wildlife Trust, this work is now (March 2016) nearly complete so that we should shortly be in a position to submit the formal applications to MMO and others. It will have cost nearly £70,000 in fees and expenses to get this far.

This sum has been raised by contributions from members of the trust, local charities including Essex Communities Foundation's Minter Family and Acorn Funds, Essex County Council Community Initiatives Fund, Colchester Borough Council, and Environment Agency. West Mersea Town Council has pledged up to £1800 if required. We have also received valuable support and practical assistance from RSPB and Essex Wildlife Trust. The trustees and other volunteers have given their time for free.

Once we have the required approvals, we can negotiate with Harwich Harbour Authority (HHA) for the supply and delivery of the recharge material which would involve chartering a special dredger able to access the shallow water and precisely distribute the material into position by a "Rainbow" water jet.



We are expecting to have to pay Harwich up to £300,000 so have made application to various bodies for grants to fund those costs and ongoing costs of maintenance and monitoring.

The timing of the recharge is entirely dependent on HHA's own dredge programme, which is expected to start late 2017. If all goes according to plan this recharge should provide protection for our harbour for at least the next 70 to 100 years, ensuring the fishing, oystering, sailing, crabbing, birdwatching and enjoyment of the waterside will continue for our children, their children and generations to come.

For more information, see our website [www.savemerseaharbour.org](http://www.savemerseaharbour.org)

*Save Mersea Harbour*