



# Lights out for landmark

## 'SAD LOSS': Plans to close iconic lighthouse

By Tom Potter

IT has been an iconic landmark on the Suffolk coast for more than 200 years.

But the lights could be about to go out for the last time at Orfordness lighthouse after it emerged it has been recommended for closure.

The historic landmark has been under threat from a fast-eroding coastline in recent years, and now the latest five-year review by Trinity House – which manages lighthouses around England, Wales and the Channel Islands – has said it may no longer be needed.

It plans to discontinue all navigational aids at Orfordness, instead increasing the range of the Southwold lighthouse – which itself earned a reprieve from a possible decommissioning last year – from 16 to 24 nautical miles.

Captain Roger Barker, the authority's director of navigation, said that as navigational technology continued to advance the reliance on the traditional system of lighthouses around the coast had diminished.

Keith Seaman, the current Orfordness lighthouse keeper, said it would be a sad loss.

"Obviously, there will be some objection from people used to looking at the Orford skyline and seeing what has become an iconic tower standing there," he said.

"It would be a tremendous blow if it disappeared. For me, it would be a sad loss, having worked there since 1994.



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Keith Seaman, lighthouse keeper

**PART OF THE LANDSCAPE:** Above, the iconic lighthouse at Orfordness which has been recommended for closure and, right, lighthouse keeper Keith Seaman, who says it will be a 'tremendous blow' if the tower is demolished

Main photo: MIKE PAGE



within five years unless moved inland or rebuilt with stronger foundations.

Adrian Underwood, whose father Charlie spent more than 28 years as lighthouse attendant before retiring in 1994, and was awarded the MBE for his service to Trinity House, said its loss would be "a shame".

Mr Underwood, the youngest of his six sons, said: "I had heard that the lighthouse was getting very close to the sea due to coastal erosion and that they may have to demolish it.

"It would be such a shame to see a building that has been there since 1792 meet its end after so many years."

The lighthouse could still prove a vital navigation tool in the event of failing electronic or satellite positioning systems, and objection to the proposed switch-off is already being sounded by members of The Alde and Ore Association, which exists primarily to preserve the Alde, Ore and Butley Creek rivers and their banks.

Public consultation into the future of Orfordness lighthouse continues until January 29. Responses should be sent to Navigation Directorate, Trinity House, Tower Hill, London, EC3N 4DH or by e-mailing navigation.directorate@thls.org

## KEEPING WATCH ON HISTORY

■ The stretch of water overlooked by Orfordness lighthouse is notoriously treacherous – on one night in 1627, 32 ships hit the shore leaving barely any survivors. The lighthouse, in its original form, was established a decade later.

■ On June 23, 1707, the wooden building was attacked by a French pirate who damaged a lantern and stole items including the keeper's beds.

■ In 1792, a new brick tower was built and remains standing to this day.

■ In 1959, the lighthouse was converted to electric power.

■ Its lantern burns with the intensity of 635,000 Candela and has a range of 25 nautical miles.

■ The lighthouse is often used by sceptics to explain the lights seen by US airmen during the world-famous Rendlesham UFO incident in 1980.



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