

Date of Meeting 20th October 2020

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Coastal Change Management Areas

Report summary:

To highlight work that has been undertaken by Plymouth University to develop a methodology for defining where is likely to be affected by physical changes to the coast over the next 100 years. As part of this academic research, a section of the East Devon coast (from Sidmouth to Lyme Regis) has been used as a pilot study. New plans are available that indicate the likely coastal position in 20, 50 and 100 years, if erosion continues at the rate it has over the past 20 years. These plans indicate that more residential properties may be affected by coastal change than were identified previously, in the Shoreline Management Plan. However, the new plans do not take account of coastal protection measures proposed in the Seaton and Sidmouth Beach Management Plans, which are designed to reduce erosion rates. The work has been carried out expressly for planning purposes and is distinct from other modelling work carried out for other purposes.

Recommendation:

1. That the erosion lines for the Sidmouth to Lyme Regis coast are noted for planning purposes.
2. That the proposed methodology is noted for any further work on the remainder of the East Devon coast and for any designation of Coastal Change Management Areas through the local plan process.
3. That the proposed next steps are considered and an approach to communicating the issues highlighted in this report to affected residents and businesses agreed.
4. That Members recommend that Cabinet consider the wider implications of this study beyond the setting of planning policy at their earliest opportunity.

Reason for recommendation:

To make Members aware of the work undertaken by Plymouth University so that it can be incorporated into the local plan review.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action
- Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Finance

- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Financial implications:

There are no issues impacting council finances at this stage

Legal implications:

Local Planning Authorities should take into account up to date evidence to inform local plan policy preparation. There are no legal implications other than as set out in the report.

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: High Risk; the methodology has been prepared through joint working with the relevant statutory bodies and utilises the academic expertise of Plymouth University. The main aim of the work is to identify areas at risk of coastal change over the next 100 years so that appropriate policies and actions can be initiated. The outcome highlights the potential for coastal change to affect a greater number of properties than were previously thought to be at risk.

Links to background information [National Planning Policy Framework: Flood risk and coastal change - GOV.UK Shoreline Management Plan; Shoreline Management Plan](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

Report in full

1 Background

- 1.1 We have been working with Plymouth University, Torridge District Council, North Devon District Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation on a coastal change research project. The main aims of the project are:
 - to develop a clear, concise and repeatable methodology on how to define areas likely to be affected by physical changes to a range of coastline areas e.g. estuarine, cliffs, and beaches; and
 - to provide a robust, scientifically supported Coastal Change Management Area (CCMA) designation for the pilot areas (Sidmouth to Lyme Regis and the Taw Torridge Estuary).
- 1.2 The project has been funded through the South West Partnership for Environment and Economic Prosperity (SWEEP) at no direct cost to EDDC. SWEEP is a partnership project with the aim of delivering economic and community benefits to the South West, whilst protecting and enhancing the area’s natural resources. It is a collaboration of three research institutions: the University of Exeter, Plymouth Marine Laboratory and the University of Plymouth. There is widespread planning/coastal interest in the project.
- 1.3 A briefing paper has been produced to explain the project outputs in more detail and this is appended to this report. This includes maps to show both the Shoreline

Management Plan (SMP) lines and the new predictions (the SMP is a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal processes; we adopted it in 2011 and it is currently being refreshed). A 'frequently asked questions' paper is also appended that could be used to help explain the research in advance of consultation on the new local plan.

2 Planning policy context

- 2.1 The project has been undertaken because, although the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires councils to identify CCMA's where rates of shoreline change are expected to be significant over the next 100 years, few local planning authorities have felt confident to undertake this task, citing a lack of reliable or consistent guidance or methodology to establish such designations. As such, development continues in often active coastal zones, with little regard for future shoreline shifts.
- 2.2 The pilot study of part of the East Devon coast included in the research is intended to provide evidence to justify the designation of Coastal Change Management Areas (CCMA's) as part of the new Local Plan. CCMA's are needed where there are expected to be significant physical changes to the coastline within 100 years. The pilot area covers approximately half of our coastline and we propose to use the agreed methodology to inform the designation of CCMA's along the remainder of the coast. Within the CCMA, policies will be devised through the local plan process to set out what kind of development may be appropriate and to enable the relocation of uses/infrastructure/buildings where possible.
- 2.3 The aim of a Coastal Change Management Area is not to stop all development; it's about being sensible about what development is suitable for the given time frames. For example, a holiday park site redevelopment should consider building hard infrastructure such as swimming pools at the inland edge of the plot, and dedicate the seaward land to parkland. A Coastal Change Management Area could also help us to plan positively for change. For example it could highlight the need and options for relocating key infrastructure or help to consider options for natural habitat creation such as salt marshes on the edge of estuaries.

3. Implications of work

- 3.1 The research also provides evidence for our work as a Coastal Protection Authority and could be useful in helping to justify the coastal protection works proposed in the Seaton and Sidmouth Beach Management Plans. The project is nearing completion with a methodology and lines of erosion having been produced. The methodology for defining the CCMA varies according to which type of coastline is involved (beaches, cliffs or estuaries).
- 3.2 The approach for cliffs (which predominate in the East Devon pilot area) involves very detailed modelling work including past cliff erosion rates and projected sea level rises. It should also be made clear that, for areas where the Shoreline Management Plan is not to 'hold the line', the plans do not take account of any coastal defence works that are planned. This is particularly significant in the case of the number of properties potentially affected by coastal change at Seaton and Sidmouth. The prime purpose of the work, with Environment Agency, Natural England and Marine Management Organisation support, is to produce a standardised process that can be replicated around the country, to produce a robust, consistent and coherent assessment of potential coastal change (that is coastal change in the absence of sea defences).
- 3.3 The factors that influence the lines drawn on the maps have been deliberately set to identify the fullest extent of area likely to be affected by physical changes to the coast. This is because it is considered to be best practice to take a precautionary approach in order to give the Local Planning Authority the best opportunity to

manage development that could either be affected by coastal change or could have an impact on coastal change. The plans include a 'buffer zone' to allow for variability in retreat rates, mapping accuracy and the southwest coastal path, where necessary.

- 3.4 For the pilot area this approach shows that, in a small number of cases, a greater area could be affected by coastal change and in a shorter timescale than previously thought likely (either in the Shoreline Management Plan or in subsequent work such as beach management plans). Maps showing both the SMP lines and those provided by Plymouth University are included at the end of the accompanying briefing paper.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The new research is primarily aimed at providing a sound basis to identify which areas are likely to be subject to coastal change in the next 100 years so that appropriate plans and policies can be put into place. It is however important to note that the work is for planning purposes and distinct from work on coastal defences.
- 4.2 We acknowledge that the implications of this work will be worrying for the residents and businesses affected and we have prepared a 'frequently asked questions' document to help inform people of the issues involved (see attached). We plan to consult on draft plans and policies for CCMA's through the local plan process. In the meantime there is a question of how and to what extent information about this emerging work is communicated to the affected residents and businesses following Members consideration of this report. Options include a press release, communication through social media, writing directly to affected properties etc. Member's views are sought on these options.
- 4.3 The wider implications of this work beyond planning policies will also need further discussion by the Council and so it is recommended that Cabinet consider a further report on these issues.
- 4.4 As a local planning authority we will focus on defining and developing the right policies to guide new and existing development in Coastal Change Management Areas through the new local plan. The Plymouth University research provides valuable evidence to help us determine where CCMA's should be designated, but we will also consider the refreshed SMP and the views of statutory bodies including Natural England and The Environment Agency.