

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 3 December 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## **Exmouth Beach Management Plan Update**

### **Report summary:**

The existing Exmouth Beach Management Plan (BMP) was produced in 2015 and sets out how the Exmouth coastal defences are to be monitored and maintained in line with the long-term strategic approach as set out in the Shoreline Management Plan (2011) and Exe Estuary Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy (2013). Since 2015, there have been a number of developments including updates to sea level rise and climate change guidance, collection of more monitoring data, and seawall failures at Exmouth. As a result, it was timely to review and update the BMP and this report presents a summary of the key outputs of that work.

A key focus of the BMP update was to critically review and re-appraise the long-term strategic approach to sustainably managing the present and future risks of coastal flooding and erosion over the next 100 years, to secure the long-term future of Exmouth seafront for future generations to enjoy in the way that many people do so today. This has involved assessment of the technical, environmental and economic viability of a range of options, and involved input from local and statutory stakeholders, including public consultation between November 2024 and February 2025. As a result, three leading options for the future management of coastal flood and erosion risk along the Exmouth BMP have been identified. These are combined to provide an adaptive pathway approach to future decision making that is based on key triggers.

The actions specified in these options would not be undertaken immediately. In the interim it is important that the short-term recommendations of the updated BMP – including for ongoing monitoring and maintenance – are implemented over the next 5 to 10 years to ensure the beach and existing defences are kept in a good to fair condition to facilitate future improvements over the long term. Alongside that ongoing monitoring and maintenance activity, the BMP update also sets out the forward programme and actions for EDDC to progress the leading.

### **Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget                      Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework      Yes ☒ No ☐

### **Recommendation:**

- 1) That Cabinet adopt the Exmouth BMP Update and support the leading options set-out in the adaptive pathway approach as the basis for managing the Exmouth BMP frontage in the short, medium and long-term.
- 2) That Cabinet support recommending that progressing this project, including preparatory work by South West Flood & Coastal, is promoted as a priority for the successor authority following Local Government Reorganisation to commence in 2028/29.
- 3) In the meantime, Cabinet support South West Flood & Coastal in progressing preparatory studies below £100k, utilising the remaining budget previously approved by Cabinet for development of the BMP on 2 October 2024 of £140k rather than returning the underspend to the general pot as proposed in that previous paper.

## Reason for recommendation:

Adopting the updated BMP and strategic approach it sets out will enable preparatory work to commence in the coming years by South West Flood & Coastal with aim of commencing work to develop a business case for the local or national options from 2028/29 in order to provide long-term sustainable management of coastal flood and erosion risk to Exmouth.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☒ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☒ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** High Impact; the impacts of climate change such as sea level rise will lead to increased risk of coastal flooding and erosion at Exmouth if the strategic long-term sustainable options set-out in the updated BMP are not implemented

**Risk:** High Risk; Failure to implement the local or national leading options set out in the updated BMP will mean there is an increasing risk of seawall failures along the Exmouth frontage and risk of loss of infrastructure and amenity, including the beach, with wider negative impacts on the area.

**Links to background information** <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/xicipyar/short-version-exmouth-bmp-consultation-summary-report-copy.pdf>

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
  - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
  - ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
  - ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services
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## Report in full

1.1 The management of coastal flood and erosion risk along the Exmouth coast is guided by the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) policies adopted in 2011. For the Exmouth Beach Management Plan (BMP) frontage (see Figure 1), these policies are to “Hold the Line” for the next 100 years.



Figure 1: Exmouth BMP extent.

- 1.2 To understand in more detail how best to implement the SMP policies, in 2013 the Environment Agency led the production of the Exe Estuary Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (EEFCERMS).
- 1.3 For the majority of the Exmouth BMP frontage (and in particular from The Maer to Orcombe Point), this concluded a preferred option as being to do maintenance of coastal defences and manage beach levels to prevent undermining failure of the seawall and at some point in the future raise the height of the seawall for this area. This approach was selected based on the national Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA) funding rules for new coastal defences set by Government, because there is an insufficient number of houses and other benefits in the area at risk from coastal erosion to justify a larger scheme, and even this option would require a significant amount of partnership funding contributions from non-FDGiA sources as a funding gap of about 85% was calculated at the time.
- 1.4 The preferred option in the EEFCERMS in the eastern part of the BMP frontage was to upgrade the defences because this area is (in part) within the area at risk of tidal / coastal flooding and so was able to justify the now completed Exmouth Tidal Defence Scheme to protect properties etc at risk in that area.
- 1.5 To guide near-term management of the coastal defences and beach levels in line with the EEFCERMS, in 2015 the Exmouth BMP was produced. The 2015 Exmouth BMP reflects the EEFCERMS long-term approach and identified actions in the next 5 years or so required to work towards the implementation of the long-term approach. This means ongoing maintenance of coastal defences (i.e. seawall and groynes) as well as possible occasional beach recycling to move sand from areas of high beach levels to areas of low beach levels. It also recommended that efforts be made to identify and secure the necessary funding to implement the long-term strategy set out in the EEFCERMS (i.e. find the approx. 85% of funding needed to unlock the available FDGiA). This is all set out in the current Exmouth BMP from 2015 – in particular see the exec summary and section 1.7.2 of this document available on the EDDC BMP webpage here: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/1769131/exmouth-bmp.pdf>.
- 1.6 The 2025 Exmouth BMP Update project has reviewed and reconsidered both the long-term strategic approach to managing coastal erosion and flood risk along the open-coast at

Exmouth, and the required actions to facilitate implementation over the next 5 to 10 years, in light of more recent evidence and information that has been developed since 2015, which include changes to the national FDGiA rules in 2020/21, new monitoring data, updates to climate change guidance, completion of the Exmouth Tidal Defence Scheme, and seawall failures at Exmouth.

1.7 For clarity, National guidance allows consideration of following items in economic damages assessment to access FDGiA funding:

- Loss of residential and non-residential properties to flooding.
- Loss of residential and non-residential properties to coastal erosion.
- Indirect damages, inc:
  - Damages to vehicles
  - Traffic disruption
  - Road damages
  - Education service closure
  - Loss of life
  - Mental health.

1.8 As part of the Exmouth BMP update, these eligible criteria have been re-assessed and the conclusion is that under a Do Nothing scenario over a 100 year appraisal period, there is approximately £20m of Present Value (PV) coastal flood and erosion damages available in the BMP area. Figure 2 illustrates the areas at risk of coastal flooding and erosion in 100 years' time that form the basis of this damages value.

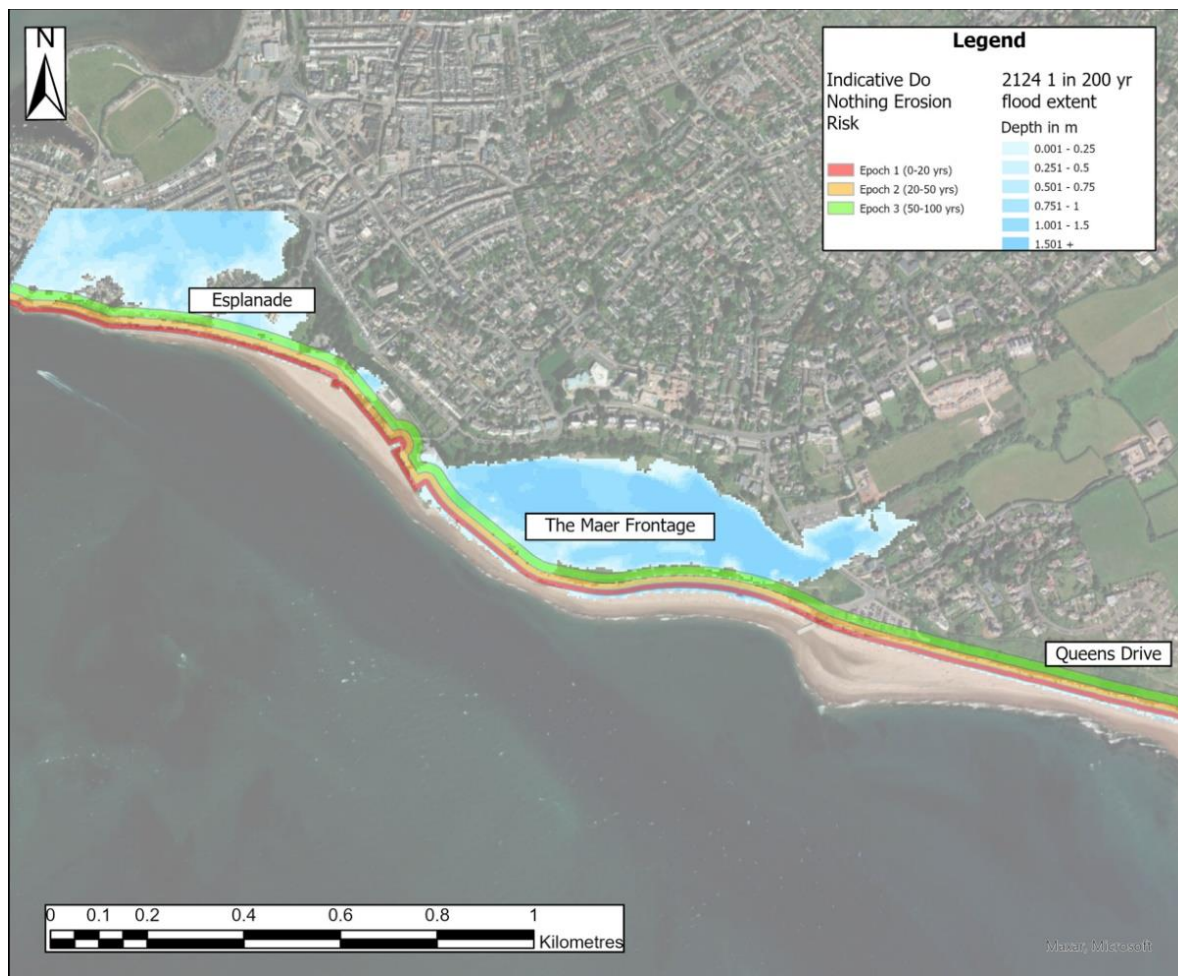


Figure 2: Areas at risk of flooding and erosion along the Exmouth BMP frontage in the next 100 years if we do nothing to manage the coastal defences.



- 1.9 In addition to assessing the current national FDGiA funding eligible criteria, for the Exmouth BMP update, we have also undertaken an assessment to establish the economic damages of coastal flooding and erosion to the local economy including a loss Gross Value Added (GVA), damages to the visitor economy, reductions to local economy income streams (such as beach hut and car park revenue), loss of coastal recreation welfare value and impacts to physical health.
- 1.10 The local damages calculated as part of this assessment are not eligible to be included as part of a compliant assessment (under the current national FDGiA rules) as they represent local level financial impacts that could theoretically be transferred in other parts of the country when considered at a national level. However, the local damages calculated in this assessment can be used by the project team as an evidence base to help support funding discussions with potential partners at the local level and to raise awareness of the broader risks and impacts associated with coastal flooding and erosion along the BMP frontage. This assessment has concluded that the non-FDGiA eligible economic damages to the local area under a Do Nothing scenario over a 100-year appraisal period equate to in excess of £800m of Present Value (PV) damages.
- 1.11 These wider local benefits are not eligible to be used as a basis for seeking national FDGiA funding, but are able to be used to evidence why funding from other sources can be bid for to deliver coastal defence schemes as part of measures that seek to deliver multiple benefits to an area (e.g. through also improving public realm not just reducing coastal flood and erosion risk).
- 1.12 It should be noted that the EEFCERMS in 2013 did not consider the wider local economic benefit to Exmouth of the beach and coastal defences.
- 1.13 The wider local benefits to Exmouth highlighted by the GVA assessment, as well as feedback from stakeholders across the community about the value of the seafront and beach for tourism and recreation purposes, has been taken onboard as part of the review of the long-term strategic approach to coastal flood and erosion risk management across the BMP frontage as part of the BMP update project.
- 1.14 This review of the long-term strategic approach has considered all the feasible options to manage coastal erosion and flood risk from long-list to short-list, and been informed by feedback from the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024 stakeholder workshop that discussed 10 short-listed options, and by feedback from public consultation 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024 and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025 (see Consultation Summary Report; <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/xicipyar/short-version-exmouth-bmp-consultation-summary-report-copy.pdf> ).
- 1.15 This work has led to the identification of three leading options for the future management of coastal flood and erosion risk along the Exmouth BMP that combined provide for an adaptive pathway approach to future decision making that is based on key triggers such as condition of assets and availability of funding (illustrated in Figure 3) and summarised as follows:
- 1.16 **The National Economic Leading Option – Seawall Encasement with Setback Floodwall:**
- This is the most cost-beneficial option following the current national appraisal and funding rules for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management as defined by Government.

- This option will significantly reduce the risk of coastal erosion and flooding whilst reducing the reliance on having high beach levels in front of the seawall (i.e. it will reduce the risk of undermining posed by low beach levels that occur along Exmouth Beach).
- This option is an evolution of the 2013 EEFCERMS preferred strategic approach, in the knowledge that the previous 2013 option to maintain the existing wall and prevent undermining has not been successful (as evidenced by autumn 2023 failures), so continuing that is not really feasible and we need a more significant capital intervention to achieve the aim of the EEFCERMS (and SMP policy); i.e. to continue to defend the Exmouth BMP frontage.
- However, as a consequence the beach at Exmouth would be vulnerable to erosion during storms and becoming smaller or even lost longer term as sea levels rise, which would have a significant impact on the amenity value of the beach and tourism in Exmouth.
- Under the current funding rules, this option is only eligible for £800,000 to £900,000 of central Government funding for coastal defence works. To implement this option, additional funding of around £18 million would need to be secured.
- This option would not need to be implemented until about 2035, so there is around 10 years or so to seek the funding contributions necessary. In the interim, ongoing maintenance of existing defences in line with the current BMP approach would be required.

#### **1.17 The Local Aspirational Leading Option – Beach Nourishment with Groynes and Setback Floodwall:**

- This option recognises the option 1 may not be preferable for the local community and so proposes an alternative option that has been identified through engagement with local stakeholders that will deliver wider benefits to the area beyond just protection against coastal erosion and flood risk.
- This option therefore aims to continue to use the beach as the main defence in front of the existing seawall, with the existing groynes along Queens Drive being replaced and new groynes being constructed along The Maer section of beach. The groynes could be constructed of timber or rock and would help control the beach levels more than at present. This would therefore also retain the beach for its wider amenity and tourism benefits. If this option is progressed, there would need to be further detailed modelling to determine the most appropriate groyne design and arrangement along the shoreline.
- With sea level rise this option may not fully address the risk of coastal flooding long-term, and so a setback floodwall may also need to be constructed at a future date.
- This option is most closely aligned to the 2013 EEFCERMS preferred strategic approach and would secure the long-term future of Exmouth seafront for future generations to enjoy in the way that many people do so today. However, it costs more than option 1 and so under the current funding rules it cannot be selected as the National Economic Leading Option.
- As for the national option:
  - Under the current funding rules, this option is only eligible for £800,000 to £900,000 of central Government funding for coastal defence works. To implement this option, additional funding of between £20-23 million would need to be secured.
  - This option would not need to be implemented until about 2035, so there is around 10 years or so to seek the funding contributions necessary. In the interim, ongoing

maintenance of existing defences in line with the current BMP approach would be required.

#### **1.18 The Back-up Option – Do Minimum:**

- This option is the current approach to managing the risks of coastal flooding and erosion at Exmouth and is unlikely to secure the frontage in the long-term. It also means that there will be a significant risk of further seawall failures requiring expensive emergency works at great cost to EDDC which cannot be planned for.
- However, it is included here as the back-up option as we recognise that both the national and local options require significant funding contributions to be found to unlock the proportion of funding that is available for coastal defence works from central Government.
- Recognising that it is uncertain if or when that additional funding will be secured, this option provides a lower cost solution to managing the risk of coastal erosion and flooding in the immediate future but will not be a sustainable solution over the long-term. It will, however, buy time to then think about alternative options (i.e. coastal adaptation).
- This option therefore would involve small-scale repair and maintenance of the existing seawall and groynes but would not address the risk of undermining of the seawall if the beach in front lowers in future as a result of storms.
- This option is not eligible for central Government funding for coastal defences and so would depend on funding coming from Local Authority budgets.
- The cost of this option is uncertain and will depend on the number and frequency of storm events and what damage they may cause. It is likely that over a 20 year period this may be in the order of a few £m to several tens of £m.

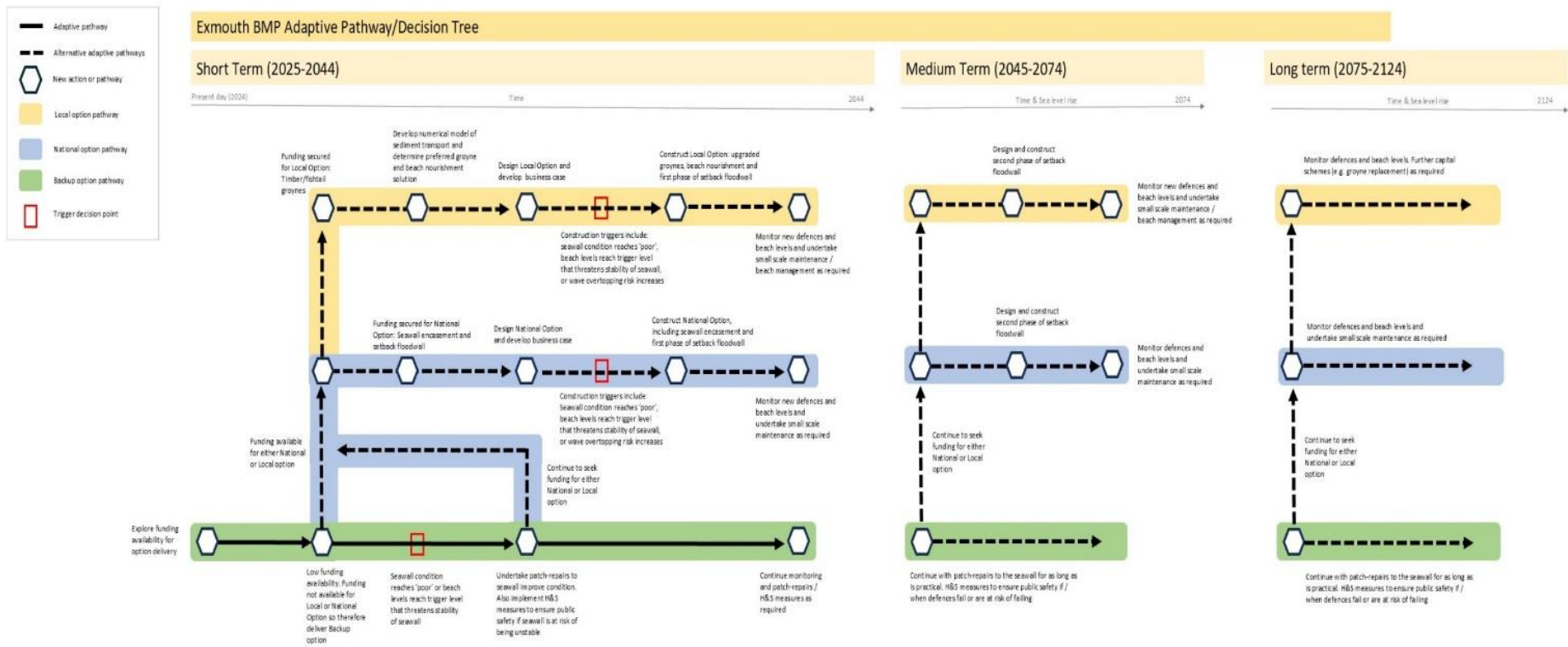


Figure 3: Exmouth BMP Adaptive Pathways Decision Tree



- 1.19 As evident above, Funding is a key constraint when undertaking flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes. Funding from central government (FDGiA) is available for coastal defences. However, this typically does not cover the full cost of a coastal defence scheme and is distributed based on the benefits that are delivered. Central government funding will need to be topped up by other sources of funding and contributions in order to deliver the leading option.
- 1.20 It should be noted that on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2025, Defra published a new funding policy (see [Flood and coastal erosion risk management funding policy](#)) which means the rules for accessing FDGiA are due to change in April 2026. This means that the amount of additional funding stated in paragraphs above is expected to reduce from £19-24m to a minimum of between £1.6-£2.1m to deliver either of the National Economic or Local Aspirational options. The new funding policy also sets out the basis on which FDGiA will be prioritised, and in this regard states that if more than the minimum additional funding is raised, this will increase a scheme's priority.
- 1.21 Given that funding is a key constraint for all three options for the Exmouth BMP frontage, we have identified the three option types (National Economic, Local Aspirational and Backup) so that the delivery team can move between them over time, depending on the amount of funding that may be available. Other factors will also influence which option is delivered, such as the onset of coastal flooding and erosion risks, and the frequency of storm damage necessitating emergency repairs.
- 1.22 The movement between the different options are known as 'Adaptive Pathways'. It provides the delivery team with the required flexibility to adjust course depending on the risks / funding availability. For example, if more funding becomes available than expected, the delivery team could switch from delivering the National Economic Leading Option to the Local Aspirational Option; or if limited funding is secured, we will continue with the current approach (i.e. the back-up option) for as long as possible, but in the knowledge that this will lead to a loss of beach at Exmouth and growing risk of coastal flooding and further seawall failures (such as occurred in Autumn 2023) in the longer-term along the BMP frontage.
- 1.23 As such, these three options set-out in the adaptive pathway in Figure 3 will form the basis for how the coastal defences and beach at Exmouth are managed in the next 5 to 10 years, and drive further action to assess the options in greater detail and seek to identify and secure the necessary funding to deliver coastal defence improvements in around 10 years' time – aided by the clarity provided in terms of what is trying to be achieved and what the likely funding challenge to overcome is. The change in funding rules outlines in paragraph 1.20 will not significantly change this timeline but does greatly reduce the funding challenge.
- 1.24 Doing so will also provide clarity that enables EDDC to:
- Communicate the requirements for future coastal defences to others and enable them to potentially be integrated into wider place-making plans for the area which, in turn, will likely offer opportunities to access funding contributions that unlock the available FDGiA and contribute to delivering multiple benefits.
  - Respond rapidly if, in coming years, the national FDGiA funding rules change, as they have done in the past and are likely to do so again in future.
- 1.25 In addition to the funding challenge, there are also a number of environmental concerns that will need to be addressed and overcome in order to implement the leading options.

Various environmental assessments were undertaken to support the options appraisal and these have been approved by the relevant statutory consultees with the exception of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA).

1.26 The HRA Stage 2 (Appropriate Assessment) was progressed but identified a lack of data in order to fully quantify and assess the impacts on designated features along the BMP frontage, including in relation to the anticipated habitat loss associated with options likely to affect beach morphology and sediment transport processes. That assessment will be quantifiable once the details of a scheme to implement one of the leading options is progressed in future years, and so for this BMP update, it was agreed with Natural England that the HRA Stage 2 can be paused at this time (and not finalised), in the knowledge that development of a future scheme Outline Business Case (OBC) will need to include surveys and studies to provide the evidence to complete a HRA at the OBC stage. As such the BMP includes an explicit commitment that the National Economic Leading Option and Local Aspirational Option cannot be taken forward until the required studies are completed, an approach that has been discussed and agreed with Natural England.

1.27 The forward plan and action plan set out in the updated BMP therefore includes the need to both develop a funding strategy and undertake a range of surveys and studies to inform scheme development over the coming years. This is summarised in the following table.

Next Steps and Forward Programme	Approximate timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop business case and outline design for National or Local Options.</li> <li>- Develop funding strategy to identify funding sources and establish a plan for acquiring the funding, to gain confidence in ability to secure funding required.</li> <li>- If the Local Aspirational Option is to be taken forward, undertake numerical modelling to confirm feasibility / inform the design / consider impacts elsewhere in the sediment cell.</li> <li>- Undertake early contractor involvement to provide buildability and cost recommendations.</li> <li>- Undertake environmental surveys and analysis to address concerns identified in the HRA drafted as part of the 2025 BMP update.</li> </ul>	2028/29-2032
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop detailed design for National or Local Options.</li> <li>- Secure necessary consents such as planning permission and marine licence.</li> <li>- Agree any mitigation requirements with stakeholders such as Natural England.</li> <li>- Undertake further early contractor involvement to provide more accurate cost recommendations with completed design.</li> </ul>	2033-2034
Construction period	Estimated 2035

- 1.28 In conclusion, the decision that we must make for Exmouth and the surrounding area will affect the very nature of what we recognise as Exmouth and its jewel amenity asset, its beach. Without the beach Exmouth will lose its single main asset. Without it there is no point investing along the seafront as the main draw will be gone. The stark choice if we do not do anything the whole beach may be lost with a cost to Exmouth and the wider area of around £800m (at present value).
- 1.29 The adaptive pathway and leading options set out in the updated Exmouth BMP provide a direction of travel and opportunity to secure the Exmouth BMP frontage long-term for future generations to enjoy in the way that many people do so today. However, they also recognise that there is a significant funding challenge under the current funding rules, and that if required funding contributions are not achieved, then the approach will be to provide a minimum amount of intervention by maintaining existing defences using Council revenue budgets (as occurs currently) for a period of time. This will mean development and regeneration in at risk areas along the Exmouth BMP frontage will likely not be able to occur due to the increased level of flood and/or coastal change risk this will present.
- 1.30 That said, it is also important to note that the provision of coastal defences by EDDC is undertaken under permissive powers granted to EDDC under the Coast Protection Act 1949 and Land Drainage Act 1991; there is no statutory legal duty on EDDC to undertake these schemes. Therefore, whilst adopting the three draft proposed leading options would set out an aspiration to deliver improved coastal defences along the Exmouth BMP frontage, it would not bind EDDC to any additional financial commitments at this time. However, it will require EDDC to develop a funding strategy. When a scheme to implement one of the leading options is developed in future years, any request for financial contribution from EDDC will be brought to cabinet as required.
- 1.31 The challenge cannot be underestimated, as demonstrated by both the Sidmouth and Seaton BMPs that have taken many years to progress, but thankfully now there is sufficient funding for both those schemes. The key learning from both is that we need to start now to plan the scheme for Exmouth, to investigate other sources of finance, and to investigate every avenue of funding, in order to provide confidence that it is worthwhile investing in the surveys, studies and scheme development needed to progress the national or local options.

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### **Financial implications:**

There is a request to utilise an existing budget allocation in order to progress preparatory studies.

### **Legal implications:**

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.