

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting 3 June 2026

Heading/Title: Sidmouth Connaught Cliffs Emergency works, request for additional in year funding up to £500k

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Geoff Jung

Director/Assistant Director: Andy Wood / Andrew Hancock

Author and Directorate: Tom Buxton-Smith / Scott Cumming - Place

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Key decision Yes

If a Key Decision has it appeared on Forward Plan No

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

1. Background

- 1.1 Following annual cliff inspections, the cobblestone cliff retaining wall supporting a walkway within Connaught gardens was found to have moved since last year's inspection. This has forced the closure of the undercliff path/millennium walkway due to safety concerns. Following investigations and optioneering by designers and contractors due to the constraints the available options are estimated to be more than the available remaining budget. Therefore, in year spend is required to fix the wall to enable the undercliff/millennium walkway to open.
- 1.2 The undercliff millennium walkway is currently closed due to the risk of the retaining wall falling off the cliff onto the walkway. The walkway is an important flat link from town to the Jacobs ladder platform area, providing access to not only the beach, but the beach huts and concession.
- 1.3 A section of Connaught gardens is closed due to the risk of wall failure.
- 1.4 We have both a designer and contractor appointed and there is a concern since initial thoughts that the lower value options may not be safe enough to construct as they would be placing works staff in front of a failing wall. Unless these risks can be mitigated, they may not be possible.
- 1.5 The reason for the high costs estimated is due to all the constraints
 - Poor access below
 - Poor access from above
 - Limited working area above (that would be safe to work from)
 - Conservation area

- Near listed structures
 - Temporary works (and possible permanent works) would affect the garden layout/access considerably.
 - Height of the failing wall is about 3.5m high built upon a cliff about 7m high limiting plant and increasing risks around working from height.
 - Can't put scaffolding etc below wall, due to risk it may fail onto work staff
- 1.6 It is worth noting that Jacobs Ladder Staircase is also closed due to structural failure since its last inspection. Its repairs are currently unfunded so there may be a up to a further £250k needed at a later date to repair/replace this stair case. The structure is well fenced, and not a risk to the public, so its replacement urgency is low compared to the retaining wall. Its worth noting that the Jacobs Ladder staircase is listed, and will require full planning permission for its repairs/replacement.
- 1.7 Connaught Gardens does provide income to the council via events and weddings. Last financial year, 40 events were run with income of around £6.5k, with hope to grow this. The ongoing wall work does not remove all future income, but may reduce it, as the area is less attractive due to the restricted access and fences.
- 1.8 The works are not eligible to external grant funding from the Environment Agency, as they are not flood or coastal infrastructure. Another external ask for contributions has gone out, and subject to approval there may be an external contribution towards the works. (Not agreed at time of writing)

2. Recommendations/Decision

- 2.1 That cabinet recommends to council to approve £500k of budget to cover the works to make the area safe. Any unused budget will be returned
- 2.2 That cabinet decide on proceeding with the work as soon as possible to remove the risk to the public, or waiting for planning permission (needed as wall is in a conservation area)
- 2.3 That cabinet agree to proceed with the options for repair in the following preference Option 4.3, Option 4.4

3. Reasons for Recommendations/Decision

- 3.1 To enable the works to proceed prior to the summer season, to allow the path to open, otherwise it will be April 2027 before budget would allow construction.
- 3.2 The balance of risk to the public against construction without planning permission needs to be weighed up.
- 3.3 Options have cost/time constraints and implications to the look and layout of the area, so confirming agreed preference of options is valuable.

4. Options

All options presented would have a design life of at least 75 years

4.1 Do Nothing

Discounted due to the impact it will have on the area and Sidmouth. As well as ongoing safety concerns to the public. This is the cheapest option

available, which would be £10,000 to install permanent security fencing to try to keep the public away. This can be covered by existing budgets.

Planning permission not required for this option

4.2 Netting of existing wall

This has been discounted as the design will not meet the required specification and code.

The estimated cost is £150k and can largely be covered by existing budgets pending costings by a contractor

Full access below, and above would be maintained with this option

There will be future maintenance issues as the netting may need to be emptied and adjusted. The wall may also need to be rebuilt, however it would allow cheaper construction via scaffolding.

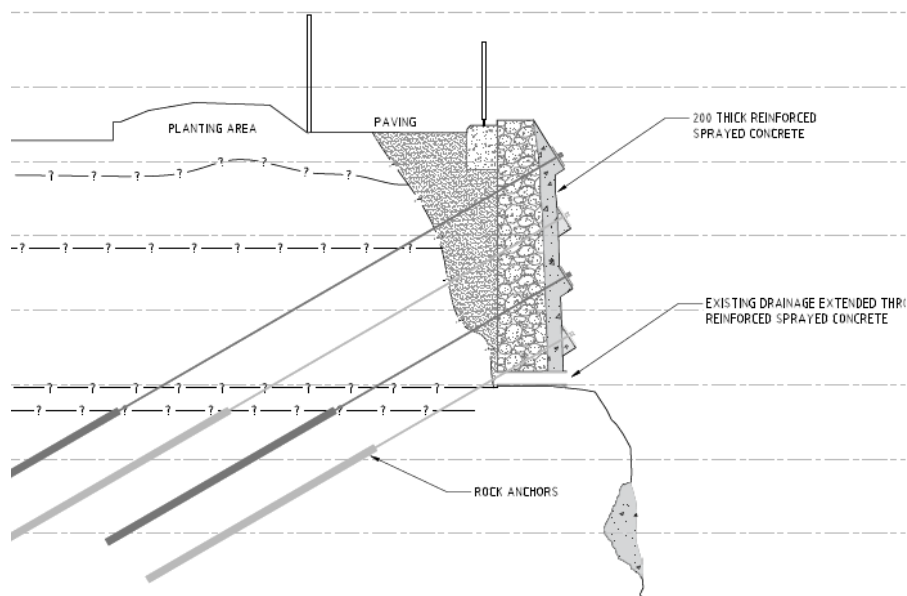
It is likely this solution may not need planning permission.

4.3 Spray concrete of existing wall,

This is the preferred option, subject to be deemed safe enough to construction by a rope access specialist

The estimated cost is £300k and will require in year approval from council for further budget. Due to demand, spray concrete is coming in very expensive with low availability.

This solution will need planning permission and may need cladding either as part of the build or at a later date due to it being within a conservation area, and near listed structures.



4.4 Remove wall and regrade area

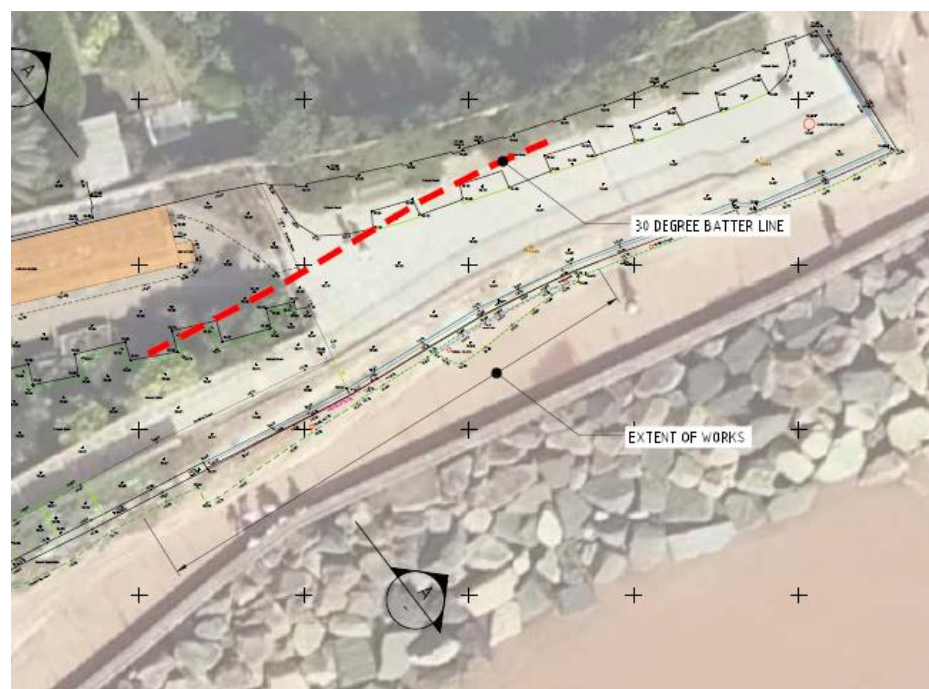
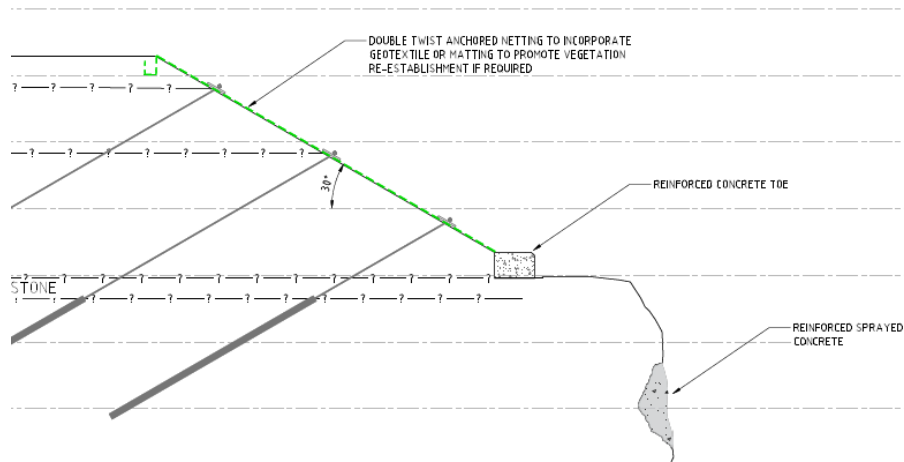
We are currently unsure on the preference on this option given the unknown costs and loss of public space in Connaught gardens. This option is to remove the failing wall and regrade the soil behind the wall. This will lose significant public space within the gardens and permanently remove a section

of cliff top footway. It is not currently known if this is acceptable with members/users. There are two options, a 30 degree batter which would lose all access to the viewpoint, or a 70 degree which limits lost public space.

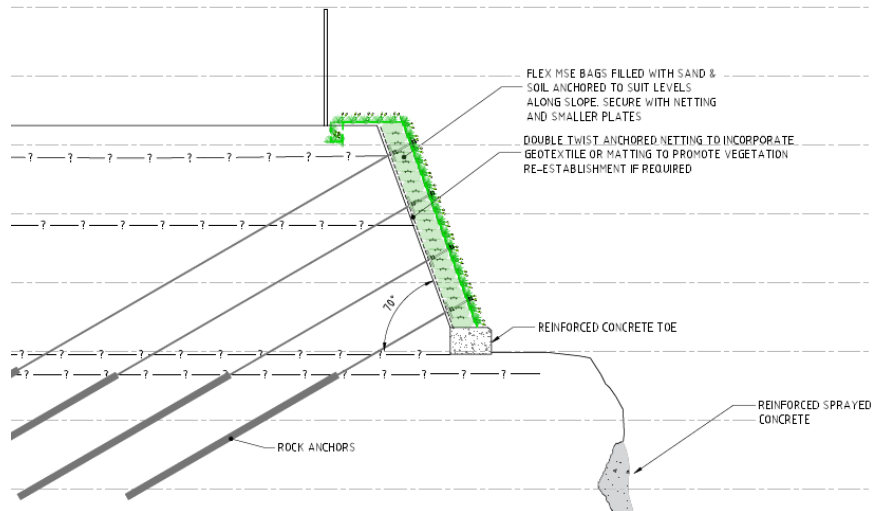
This option could cost around £250k.

This solution will need planning permission and may need cladding either as part of the build or at a later date due to it being within a conservation area, and near listed structures. Initial conversations with the conservation team indicate this option would not be preferred due to the dramatic change in appearance and layout.

30 Degree batter design



70 Degree batter design

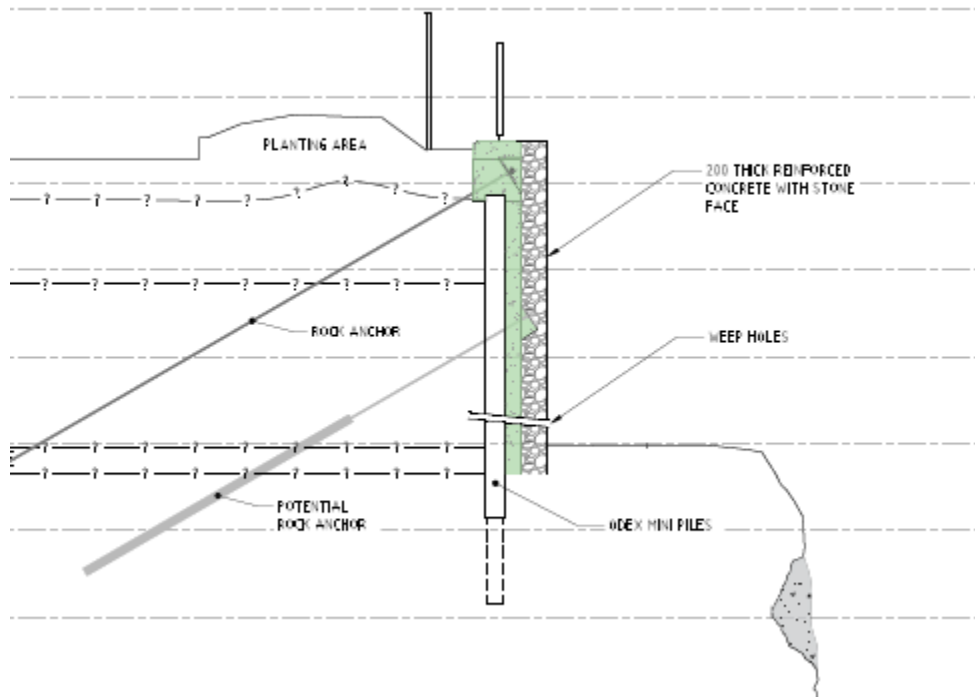


4.5 Removal wall and build new set back wall

We are currently unsure on the preference on this option given the unknown costs. We are likely to lose some public access space. This option is to build a concrete piled wall set back from the edge, which will enable the safe removal of the failing wall, and allow a safe working area to remove the failing wall and face the piled wall. This will lose some public space within the gardens and permanently remove a section of cliff top footway. It is not currently known if this is acceptable with members/users.

This option could cost around £500k.

Given the change in appearance, this will require planning permission



4.6 Removal wall and build new wall on similar alignment

We are currently unsure on the preference on this option given the unknown costs. This option is to carefully remove the wall, and soil behind, make safe and rebuild wall on a similar footprint.

Costs are estimated around £500k, but with a significantly longer programme than 4.5

Given the change in appearance, this will require planning permission

5. Planning permission.

Due to the wall being within a conservation area, and adjacent to a listed structure, all viable works will need planning permission. This will take approximately 8 weeks once submitted, so we would be looking at works being able to start late August into September.

From a planning perspective it is recommended that planning permission is granted in advance of any works. However until the wall is secured, there is a remaining risk to the public. Therefore cabinet will need to weigh up the risk of a retrospective planning permission process being carried out by the council, against public safety.



View of cobblestone retaining wall at risk of falling



Photo of crack opened up since last inspection.

6. Relevance to Council Plan/priorities

Set out how report links to the Council Plan/priorities:

- A supported and engaged community that has the right homes in the right places, with appropriate infrastructure
- A sustainable environment that is moving towards carbon neutrality and which promotes ecological recovery.

- A vibrant and resilient economy that supports local business, provides local jobs and leads to a reduction in poverty and inequality.
- A well-managed, financially secure and continuously improving council that delivers quality services

Indicate how the recommendations/decision contributes to the delivery of the Council Plan and its priorities

7. Financial Comments/Implications

6.1 The financial implications for each option identified in this report are given below. This is based on any sums required above existing capital budget levels (estimated £75k is available) will be required to be borrowed.

Do Nothing £10k – can be met with existing budget

Netting of existing wall £150k – Can be part met from existing budget, estimated **£75k additional funding required** at an annual borrowing cost of £5k (50 yrs annuity loan).

Spray concrete of existing wall £300k - Can be part met from existing budget, estimated **£225k additional funding required** at an annual borrowing cost of £15k (50 yrs annuity loan).

Remove wall and regrade area £250k - Can be part met from existing budget, estimated **£175k additional funding required** at an annual borrowing cost of £12k (50 yrs annuity loan)

Removal wall and build new set back wall £500k - Can be part met from existing budget, estimated **£425k additional funding required** at an annual borrowing cost of £29k (50 yrs annuity loan).

Removal wall and build new wall on similar alignment £500k - Can be part met from existing budget, estimated **£425k additional funding required** at an annual borrowing cost of £29k (50 yrs annuity loan).

The report highlights additional funding is being sought to reduce the level of possible borrowing required.

8. Legal Comments/Implications

7.1 The works must be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders. As the owner of the wall, the Council has a duty of care to its employees and contractors under Health and Safety legislation and to visitors under the Occupiers Liability Acts. In light of that duty of care, part of the adjoining area has been cordoned off and authority is being sought to conduct emergency works.

9. Risk Implications

- 8.1 Set out a short description (narrative) of the Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken.
- 8.2 Include details of the Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks.
- 8.3 The risk section should also include the risks for all the options considered.

Activity/ plant/ materials etc	List significant hazards	People at risk	Assessment of Risk			Existing controls e.g. Safety procedures	What further action Is required to control/mitigate the risk?
			*Impact 1-4	*Likeli hood 1-4	Risk Score		
Failure of wall	Negative press, risk of life,	Member s of the public	4	3		Security Fencing	
Permane nt closure of path	Negative press, economic damage. Amenity loss	Member s of the public	4	3			
Planning permissio n needed	Unlikely to be granted prior to construcito n	reputati on	1	4			

*Impact – Major = 4 Serious = 3 Significant = 2 Minor = 1

*Likelihood – Very Likely = 4 Likely = 3 Unlikely = 2 Remote = 1

10. Equality Implications (Public Sector Equality Duty)

- 9.1 This relevance assessment aims to analyse gathered information for potential relevance to equality. If a Full Equality Impact Assessment is required include it as an appendix. At the minimum, the following table must be completed.

Scope (Provide an overview, including objectives and desired outcomes)	N/A
Evidence gathered and engagement (List stakeholders consulted and relevant processes, policies, and data sources)	N/A

Relevance assessment findings <i>(If relevant to equality, undertake a full EIA or If no relevance to equality, explain why with supporting information)</i>	A full EIA is required: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, this assessment has demonstrated relevance to equality with regard to: Please check relevant boxes <input type="checkbox"/> Age <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy and maternity <input type="checkbox"/> Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation <input type="checkbox"/> Race <input type="checkbox"/> Gender reassignment <input type="checkbox"/> Sex <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage or Civil Partnership <input type="checkbox"/> Religion or Belief <input type="checkbox"/> Armed Forces <input type="checkbox"/> Other, e.g. carers, care leavers, low income, rurality/isolation, etc. If no, explain why:
Relevance ranking	<input type="checkbox"/> High – Very relevant to protected characteristics <input type="checkbox"/> Medium – Somewhat relevant to protected characteristics <input type="checkbox"/> Low – Not relevant to protected characteristics
Key findings and impacts	
Conclusion drawn <i>(i.e No major changes needed; EIA found no negative impact or adjust policy/process to remove identified barriers)</i>	
Actions <i>(Proposed actions to mitigate negative impacts on identified groups)</i>	
Signed off by	

11. HR and Workforce Implications

11.1 Set out any HR or Workforce implications. For advice please contact HR@eastdevon.gov.uk

12. Community Safety Implications (Crime and Disorder)

11.1 Please confirm if there are any Community Safety Implications. N/A

13. Climate Change Implications

13.1 Please confirm if there are any Climate Change implications and how the recommendations are linked to the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. N/A

14. Health & Safety and Health & Wellbeing Implications

14.1 Please confirm if there are any Health & Safety implications.
Yes – Structure is unsafe. It is sensibly fenced, although it is still possible for the public to access, and be at risk of the wall falling upon them. Without putting staff at risk, it is not possible to fully fence the walkway.

14.2 Please confirm if there are any Health & Wellbeing Implications. N/A

15. Procurement and Social Value implications

14.1 The [Public Services \(Social Value\) Act](#) came into force on 31 January 2013. The Act requires public authorities to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their area.

Further guidance is provided at the end of the report.

16. Land and Buildings (non-housing)/Asset Management Implications

15.1 The closed undercliff path allows good access to a concession, which will limit their trade if access remains shut.

17. Overview and Scrutiny Committees Comments/Recommendations

16.1 Demonstrate how scrutiny has contributed to inform the outcomes in the report. Comments from Scrutiny Committee, Overview Committee and Housing Review Board.

18. Digital and Data

17.1 Please set out any digital and data implications, for advice on this contact digital@eastdevon.gov.uk.

19. Consultation and Engagement

Fortnightly emails have gone out to ward members and local businesses. Two notice boards are in place with information for visitors.

20. Communications

19.1 Please set out any PR/Comms implications likely to arise from the recommendations in the report.

21. Next Steps

20.1 Assuming the works can be done outside of the school summer holidays, it is assumed that works will begin as soon as possible using engaged contractors using the previous papers standing order exemption. If its decided not to proceed until planning is granted, we will apply for permission as soon as possible and then plan in the work later this year.

22. Appendices

21.1 N/A

23. Background Papers

22.1 [Sidmouth Emergency Cliff Works Standing Orders Exemption .pdf](#)

Proposed Report Sign Off process

Please make sure you have obtained the relevant sign off and the date completed before submitting your report to Democratic Services.

	Officer Name	Date requested	Date Completed
Legal & Governance	Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer	19/05/2026	Required
Finance	Section 151 Officer or Deputy S151 Officer	19/05/2026	Required
Communications	communications@eastdevon.gov.uk		If applicable
Digital and Data	digital@eastdevon.gov.uk		If applicable
Engagement	engagement@eastdevon.gov.uk		If applicable
HR	HR Lead		If applicable
Chief Executive	Chief Executive		If applicable
Director	Relevant Director		Required
Assistant Director(s)	Relevant Assistant Director(s)		Required
Cabinet Lead Member(s)	Relevant Lead Member (s)		Required
Executive Leadership Team	ELT	19/05/2026	Required
Strategic Leadership Team	SLT		If applicable

broader social, economic, and environmental benefits to the community.