

Charmouth Parish Council



Charmouth Beach Management Plan

Issue 1

25/5/2017

Your Ref: Charmouth Beach Management Plan

Foreshore Committee Chairman
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Dear Mr Oatway

**ASSENT OF NATURAL ENGLAND UNDER SECTION 28H
OF THE WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981 (AS
AMENDED) Unit 56 & 57 West Dorset Coast SSSI and
Sidmouth to West Bay SAC**

Natural England assent to the proposals made in your notice of 25/5/17 under S28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) as described in the management plan attached, specifically: Implement all management operations in accordance with the Charmouth Beach Management Plan from the date shown above and valid until 25/5/2022.

Please note the important information about this assent below.

I draw your attention to your duty, under section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as inserted by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of your functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI.

Yours sincerely



Richard Warren

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Important information about this assent

If you wish to change the proposed operations or their location or to carry out additional operations for which assent has not yet been given, or if a time period set out above has expired, you must give further written notice to Natural England. Before doing so, you can seek advice from Natural England.

You may face enforcement action if you undertake unauthorised operations which destroy, damage or disturb the notified features of special scientific interest.

Before undertaking the operations specified in this assent, you may also need to get additional permissions from other authorities. For example, the assented operations might also require planning permission from the Local Planning Authority, a permit from the Environment Agency or a licence from the Forestry Commission. It is your responsibility, as the grantee of this assent, to ensure that no other permissions or consents, whether of a public or a private nature, are needed and, if any are needed, to acquire them before you exercise this assent.

This is Natural England's assent only, and it does not allow you to undertake the specified operations without first having obtained all of the necessary permissions needed to undertake the operation lawfully. If you do not obtain all of the permissions you require, and carry out the work anyway, you may face enforcement action from other authorities or parties.

As the grantee of this assent, you are responsible for carrying out the assented operation(s) safely and in all ways according to the law.

Preface

The Charmouth Beach Management Plan has been drafted in an attempt to create a foreshore management plan that is agreed by all parties involved for the foreshore at Charmouth. The current process of applying for ad-hoc permissions for individual pieces of intervention, which has proved difficult in terms of understanding the separate authorities' requirements, sometimes a slow process in fast moving circumstances.

The Charmouth Beach Management Plan is a plan that will create order, understanding, control and discipline whenever the Parish Council as the land owners believes it is appropriate to intervene in a way of managing nature's process, whether it be for the benefit of public safety, sustaining the biodiversity or maintaining the habitat.

The application of this Beach Management Plan will be for a five year period commencing 2016/17 and the Parish Council looks forward to a continuing working relationship with the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, Dorset County Council and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team.

For the effective management of Charmouth's Foreshore there are three aspects namely: physical, social and economic. This Beach Management Plan is a control and permission document for permitted works to the physical aspect of the Foreshore. The other two aspects will be further developed in the 'Vision for Charmouth's Foreshore' document.

I am grateful for assistance and guidance from Richard Warren of Natural England, Richard Edmonds formally of Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team; Sam Scriven of Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team and my colleagues on Charmouth Parish Council's Foreshore Committee.

P. R. Oatway
Chair of Foreshore Committee;
Charmouth Parish Council

September 2016

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1 Introduction

This Beach Management Plan (BMP) sets out the Parish Council's proposals for the day-to-day management of the foreshore at Charmouth for the next five years (until 2021) in consultation with the various interested parties including the Environmental Agency, Natural England and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team.

The BMP was approved by resolution of Charmouth Parish Council at a meeting held on 27th September 2016.

2 Background

2.1 Ownership

The foreshore from the eastern parish boundary to the western parish boundary including the area known as Evans Cliff together with the land to the west of the Factory Building, in which the Charmouth Coast Heritage Centre is located, is owned by the Parish Council either by land acquisition or by the gift of the land.

Unusually, the land between high water and low water is also owned by the Parish Council by virtue of a gift from Queen Anne to the Lord of the Manor of Charmouth, which the Parish Council had purchased in the nineteen thirties.

Figure 1 (below) is an indication of the lands owned by Charmouth Parish Council at the Foreshore.

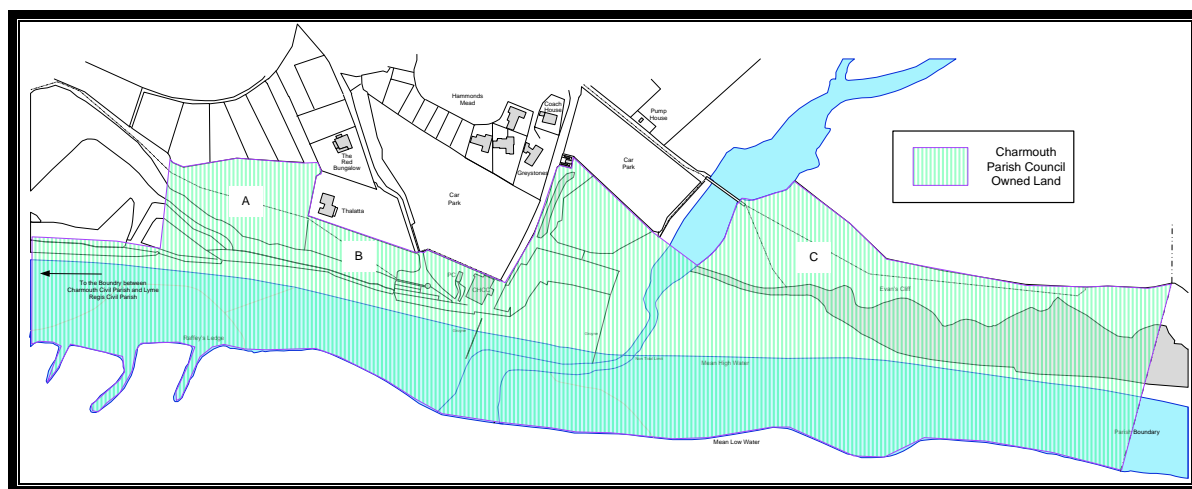


Figure 1

2.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

The land identified in Figure 2 (on page 3) has been designated as part of the West Dorset Coast SSSI which is a conservation designation denoting a protected area within the United Kingdom. SSSIs were originally set up by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, but the current legal framework for SSSIs is provided in England and Wales by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985 and further substantially amended in 2000 (by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).

The SSSI sites are known as 'West Dorset Coast Units 56 & 57' and are part of the Designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the area between Sidmouth and West Bay.

2.2.1 General Description of the Area

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee describes 'General Site Character' for this area described as¹:

- Tidal rivers, Estuaries, Mud flats, Sand flats, Lagoons (including saltwork basins) (1%);
- Shingle, Sea cliffs, Islets (54.2%);
- Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana (29.8%); and
- Dry grassland, Steppes (15%)

Along the West Dorset Coast at Charmouth the land features are listed as:

- Hettangian Sinemurian and Phiesbachian;
- Jurassic – Cretaceous Reptilia;
- Mesozoic – Tertiary Fish/Amphibia;
- Palaeoentomology;
- Vegetated sea cliffs of Atlantic and Baltic coasts;
- Coastal Geomorphology;
- Mass Movement

Survey comments from Natural England Surveyors visiting Charmouth conclude that:

Unit 57

Geological cliff exposures and undercliffs favourable, under non-intervention management allowing natural processes to occur. A huge natural landslip has occurred in recent years at the eastern end of the unit. Coltsfoot is locally abundant on the open clay, scarlet pimpernel occasional, and the clifftop grassland has frequent wild carrot and buck's-horn plantain, and occasional common knapweed and bird's-foot trefoil.

Unit 56

The geological cliff exposures and associated maritime cliff vegetation are in favourable condition, under non-intervention management allowing natural processes to occur. Some blackthorn and brambles scrub occurs on the clifftop at the western end of the unit.

The reed bed within the unit is dense with reed and nettles, and would benefit from management to create some open water. Hemp agrimony and teasel are occasional,

¹ See: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/protectedsites/sacselection/sac.asp?EUCode=UK0019864>

comfrey rare, and sea radish locally frequent at the edges of the reedbed. A small patch of Japanese Knotweed measuring c. 10 m by 4 m occurs at the SE corner and should be controlled to prevent spread.

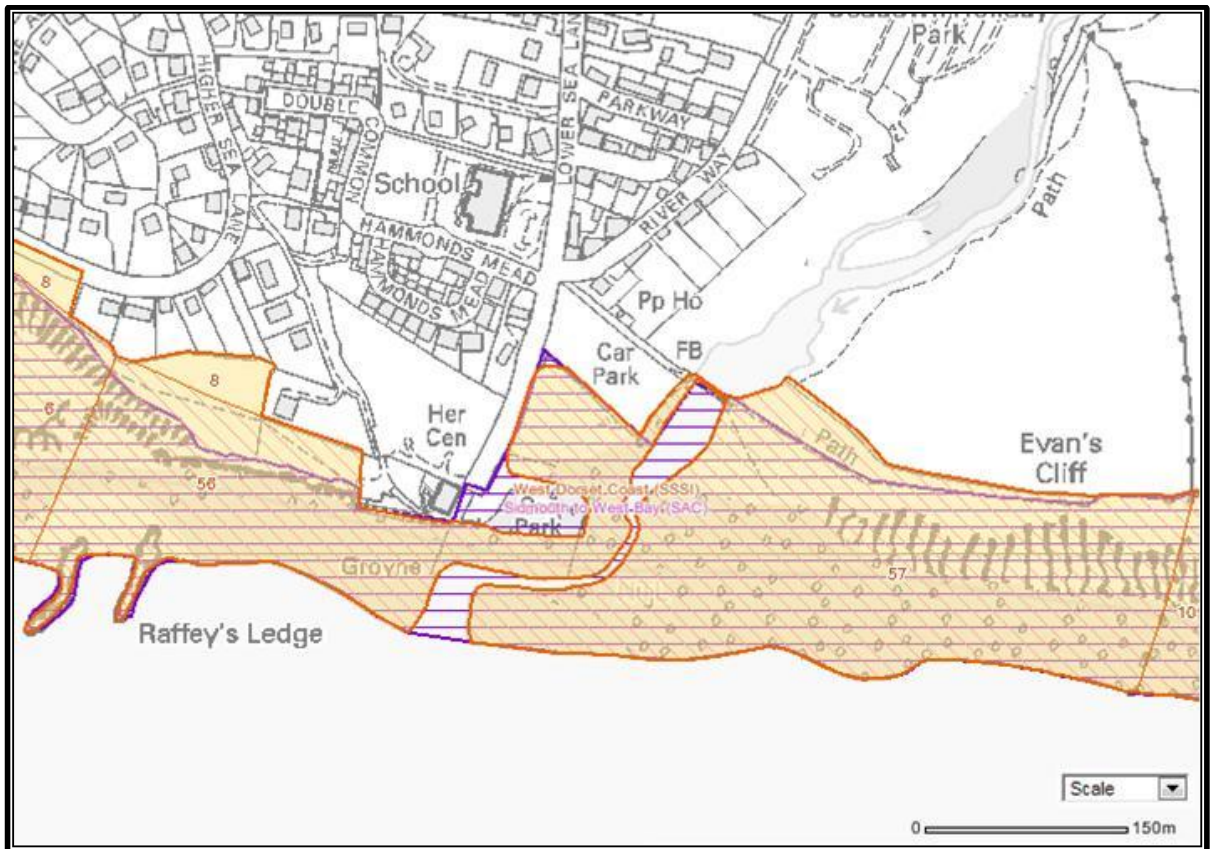


Figure 2 – Map showing Charmouth and the designated sites

Of particular interest in relation to the Beach Management Plan are the reed bed and the grassed lands on Evan's Cliff and to the west of the Factory Building.

2.2.2 Reed Bed

The reed bed to the north of the Council owned and operated car park (known as the Foreshore Car Park) is within the designated West Dorset Coast SSSI. However, the reed bed needs to be maintained in a manner that limits the disturbance to the snails. Historically the Parish Council has sought and obtained a licence to cut a quarter of the reed bed each year and the straw to be burnt in situ, in the autumn.

There is also a requirement for a safe area around the perimeter of reed bed to allow safe access, to be made visible for safety reasons the sluice gate and to limit the spread of the reeds into the surrounding hedge.

2.2.3 Grassed Lands

The grassed lands identified as letter 'C' Figure 1 (on page 1) require cutting as follows:

The lower grass land on Evan's Cliff requires to be cut fortnightly during the summer season Land identified as letter 'C1' in Figure 3 (on page 4).

The higher (rough) grassed area requires to be cut twice a year. The land is identified as letter 'C2' in Figure 3 (below).

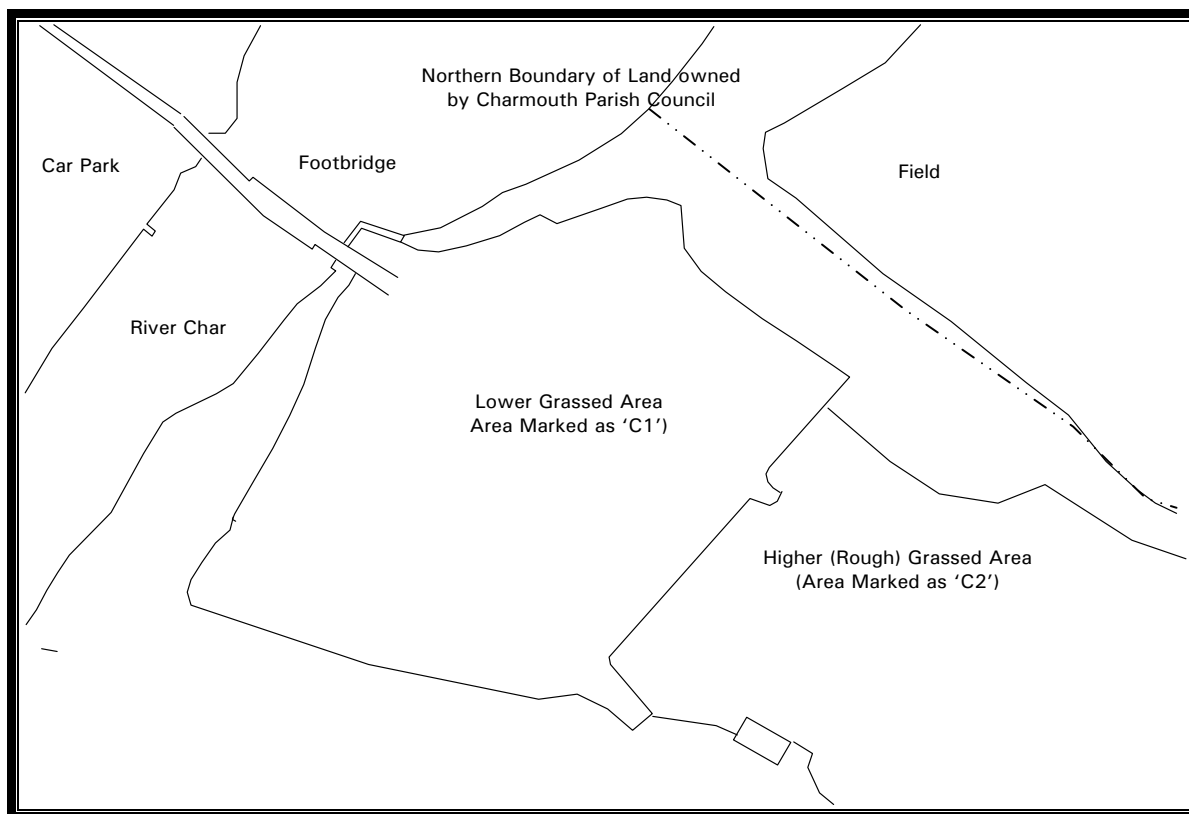


Figure 3 – Detail Areas of Grass Cutting on Evens Cliff

The grassed area near the Lookout station (marked as letter 'B' in Figure 1 [on page 1]) requires to be cut fortnightly during the summer season.

The lands beyond the Lookout station (marked a letter 'A' Figure 1 (on page 1)) requires to be cut annually.

2.3 Shoreline Management Plan

The Shoreline Management Plan (SMP2) for the area between Durlston Head to Rame Head² was issued in June 2011 and provides a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal evolution. It includes a policy framework to address these risks in a sustainable manner with respect to people and the developed, historic and natural environment. In doing so, an SMP is a high-level document that forms an important part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) strategy for flood and coastal defence (Defra, 2001). The SMP provide the policy framework from which more detailed strategies and schemes are developed to identify the best way of implementing policy. Figure 4 (on page 5) shows where SMP sits in terms of the overall context of flood and coastal erosion risk management in the UK.

As stated in Shoreline Management Plan Review 'The shoreline throughout much of the area covered by this SMP is naturally eroding and has been doing so for centuries. Man has sought to limit this natural process in many areas of the this coast where development has occurred, which has been taking place as sea levels have slowly risen

² South Devon and Dorset Coastal Advisory Group (SDADCAG) (2011), *Shoreline Management Plan Review (SMP2) : Durlston Head to Rame Head*, Halcrow Group Limited, Exeter

and land levels have gradually dropped, the latter being the ongoing, very long term consequences of the last ice-age. The erosion seen today along this coast is therefore nothing new. Flooding is also nothing new; with flood events being recorded along this coast throughout its history.³

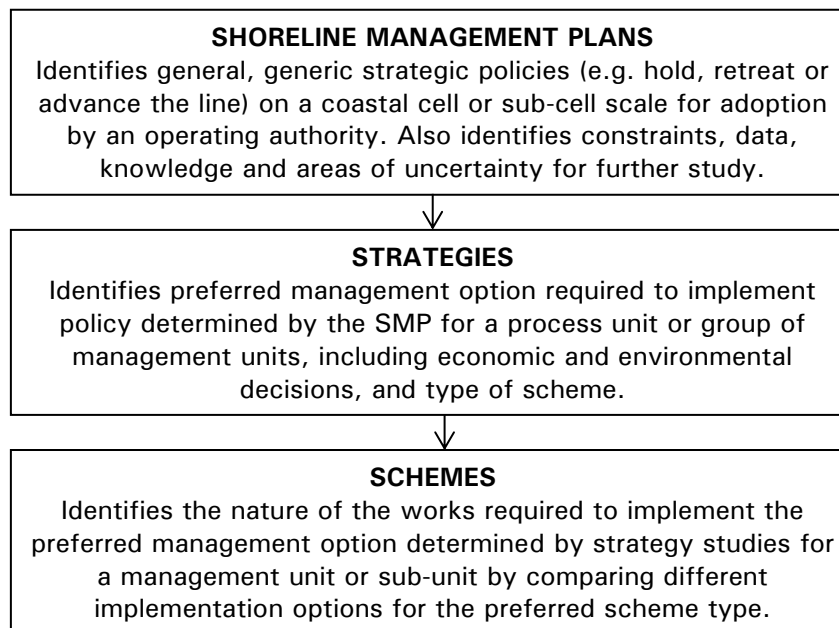


Figure 4

SMP2 describes the shoreline between Thorncombe Beacon to Beer Head as characterised by dramatic, geologically important cliffs which are subject to large-scale complex landsliding. These events are difficult to predict with any certainty, making management of this shoreline difficult. Sediment interlinkages along this frontage are relatively weak due to the interruptions caused by headlands...⁴

At Charmouth and the eastern side of Lyme Regis, there is a need to address the increasing risk further recession of the landslide complexes causing outflanking or even loss of the presently defended areas. Therefore the risk in these areas may be managed in the short to medium term through either maintenance of existing defences However, the long term defence of these areas will be determined by the extent and location of future cliff recession and so it may be necessary to consider measures to enable assets to be relocated away from the areas at risk. This would be based on continual monitoring.⁵

³ IV page 25 Section 3.1 Historical Perspective

⁴ Page 34 Section 4.1.6

⁵ Page 34/35 Section 4.1.6

Table 1 – Summary of Specific Policies

Policy Unit		Preferred Policies		
		Short Term ⁶	Medium Term	Long Term ⁷
6a18	Charmouth	Maintain existing defences through a Hold the Line policy to continue to provide protection to Charmouth.	There would be a move towards No Active Intervention along the cliffed western part of Charmouth. Managed Realignment within the River Char, through providing set-back flood defences as it becomes increasingly technically difficult to maintain defences in the existing position.	Continue the policy of No Active Intervention along the cliffed western part of Charmouth and Managed Realignment within the River Char.

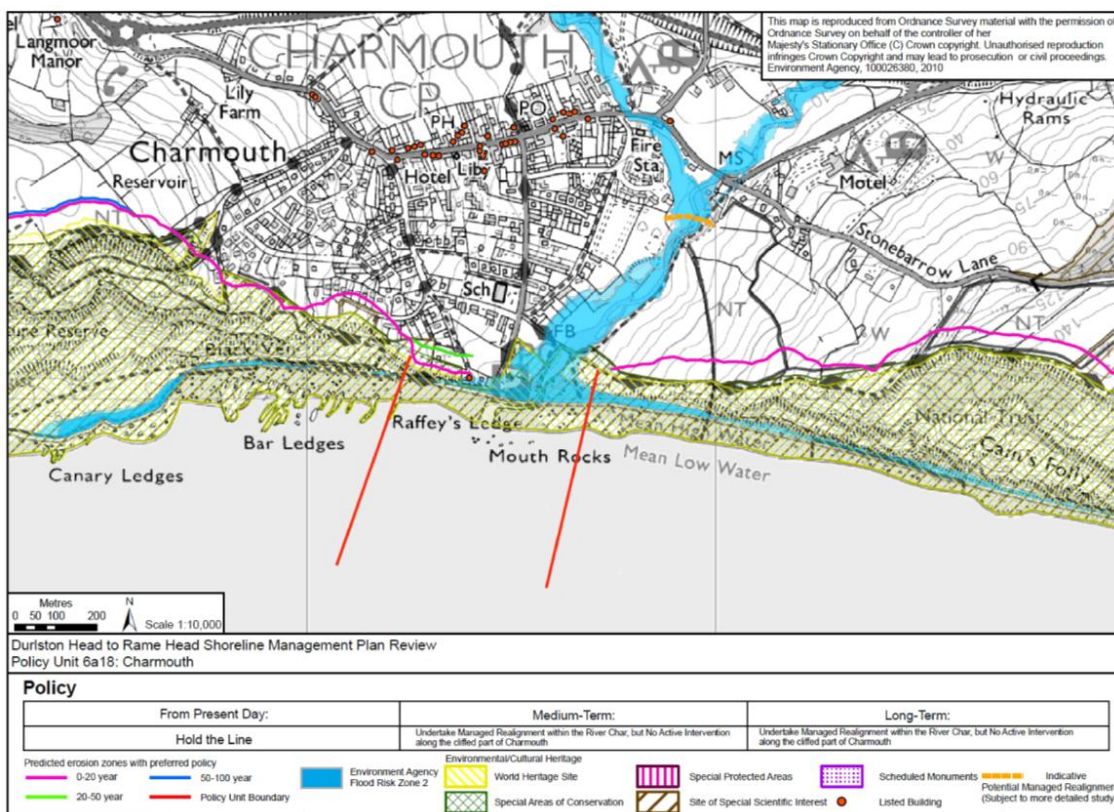


Figure 5 – Policy 6a18 – Charmouth⁸

2.3.1 River Char

The River Char flows out across the foreshore at Charmouth. Over the years the river has meandered along the beach. In the past hundred years there have been numerous

⁶ The short term (first epoch-up to 20 years) policies for the South Devon and Dorset SMP coastline provide a high degree of compliance with objectives to protect existing communities against flooding and erosion.

⁷ The preferred long term policies promote greater sustainability for parts of the shoreline and focus on sustaining and possibly enhancing the natural character of this coast.

⁸ Page 161

man-made interventions to ensure that the river's outflow is within acceptable limits, in a southerly direction. In the past groynes have been constructed to the west of the river bed to ensure that its meandering does not go further to the west.

However, with the longshore drift⁹ the mouth of the river can become dammed causing the river to cut a new channel to the east. This is particularly prevalent when there is low rain fall and / or spring high tides with winds from the south to southwest. During the winter of 2014/15 such extreme conditions existed such that the River Char self-diverted along the edge of the lower parts of Evans Cliff seeking an easier exit route to the sea near the Soft Rock Cafe. This resulted in a risk to the general public of being cut off from leaving the beach between Charmouth and Stanton St. Gabriel's steps. Permission was sought from and was granted by Natural England for the Parish Council to intervene by cutting a channel through the shingle where the river would normally flow out to sea.

During the summer periods, when the River Char water flow is lower, visitors attempt to dam the river and can, at times, be very successful causing the river to back up. Every so often the Parish Council's staff removes the structures to ensure the river's flow and thus allowing fish from the sea access to the fresh water.

2.4 Foreshore

2.4.1 Tank Traps

During the early part of the Second World War a number of tank traps (anti-tank cubes) were constructed on the foreshore of Charmouth East Beach. They form a peripheral part of the Taunton Stop Line. The Taunton Stop Line was one of more than 50 similar defensive lines that were constructed around England, all designed to compartmentalise the country to contain any breakthrough of enemy forces until British and Commonwealth reinforcements could arrive. Stop Lines used a combination of geography and construction to make continuous defence lines. The tank traps deployed (often cast in-situ along the Taunton stop line were unusual, although not unique. Known as the anti-tank cube, there were constructed from concrete and sized typically about 1.5 metres by 1.5 metres cube (5 feet cube) with an added pyramid top adding a further 30 cm approximately to the structure's height and the cube and pyramid weight in excess of 5 tones. (Most ordinary tank traps were of a simple pyramid shaped structure constructed in concrete.)

There are a number of anti-tank cubes on Charmouth's East Beach some of which are buried within the shingle. At times they become unburied due to shingle movement caused by either sea or river erosion.

None of the anti-tank cubes have been listed by Historic England or their predecessors. However, Dorset County Council's (DCC's) archaeologist has suggested that the anti-tank traps should not be moved. On occasions the anti-tanks traps have presented significant safety hazards. Notwithstanding the advice from DCC in these cases it has been necessary to either re-bury or relocate the anti-tank traps.

⁹ Longshore drift is a geographical process that consists of the transportation of sediments (clay, silt, sand and shingle) along a coast at an angle to the shoreline, which is dependent on prevailing wind direction, swash and backwash. This process occurs in the littoral zone, and in or close to the surf zone.

2.4.2 Public Access Ramp

At times the interaction of the long shore drift and the River Char's outflow results in step ridges in the shingle such that the angle and height presents a danger to visitors attempting to access the sea over the shingle. At times the height of the ridges can be over a metre high which is challenging to the less-able visitors. Historically, the Parish Council has maintained a ramp through the ridges to the east of the car park as a matter of public safety.

2.4.3 East Beach Ramp

During the winter of 2014/15 period when the River Char changed its course over the Foreshore, the gentle slopes from Evan's Cliff to Charmouth's East Beach was lost and there was a real risk to the general public of being unable to exit the beach during high tides. Permission was sought, ancillary to the request to cut a channel through the shingle, to place displace shingle near the 'Soft Rock Cafe' to provide a public pedestrian access route.

3 Beach Management Plan

Permission is sought to manage the foreshore for the next five years until 2021 as follows:

3.1 Reed Bed

To cut a quarter of the reed bed each year and the straw to be burnt in situ, in the autumn, thus ensuring the area is appropriately managed minimising the disturbance to the possible wild life within.

To maintain a safe edge within the perimeter hedge and or fence around the reed bed for safety reasons and to stop the spread of the reeds.

3.2 River Char

To manage the River Char's mouth across the foreshore to ensure that outflow is within acceptable limits in a southerly direction across the shingle foreshore; and to remove man-made structures placed by the public that dam the river's flow to ensure the river's continued flow, thus allowing fish from the sea access to the fresh water and preventing flooding up stream.

There is no intention to change the flood defence systems or affect the provisions of the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP2).

3.3 Anti-tank Traps

To manage the sites where there are Second World War anti-tank traps by either re-burying (entombing) them in sand and shingle or relocate them within Charmouth's East Beach where they present an unacceptable safety hazard.

3.4 Public Access Ramp

To maintain a public access ramp through the shingle between the car park and the River Char ensuring a safe access route through high ridges of shingle.

3.5 East Beach Ramp

To maintain a public access ramp from the lower area of Evan's Cliff near the East Beach concession (also known as the *Soft Rock Cafe*), to ensure a safe exit route from the east beach during high tides. Material for the ramp is to be collected by 'grazing' small amounts in the vicinity and in areas that are 'well trampled on' by the public so that the appearance of any mechanical or machinery operation is soon lost.

3.6 Grassed Lands

- a) The lower grass land (marked as letter 'C1' in Figure 3 [on page 4] on Evan's Cliff to be cut not more frequently than fortnightly during the summer season;
- b) The higher grassed areas (marked as letter 'C2' in Figure 3 [on page 4]) the 20 metre area strip northwards from the cliff edge (a coastal belt) should be uncut and only mowed with a loose cut, if and only if, the area becomes a problem from scrub and the like. This is to ensure the establishment of grassland flora (thrift etc.). Any required cutting of the coastal belt is only to be undertaken in September of any year. Grassed lands further north of the 20 metre coastal belt, may be mowed once with a loose cut twice a year;
- c) The grassed area near the Lookout station (marked as letter 'B' in Figure 1 [on page 1]) to be cut not more frequently than fortnightly;
- d) The lands beyond the Lookout station (marked a letter 'A' Figure 1 [on page 1]) requires to be cut annually; and
- e) The grassed areas between the reed bed and Lower Sea Lane, as well as the grassed areas between the car park and the reed bed, to be cut not more frequently than weekly throughout the year.

3.7 Sand and Shingle Extraction

To move small amounts of sand and shingle between the rock groyne to the west of the blue huts and the mouth of the River Char to provide a safe access to the blue beach huts. For the avoidance of doubt, this provision does not provide for extraction of material for any other purpose, unless stated elsewhere in this Beach Management Plan.

3.8 Invasive Plants

To allow for the removal of giant hogweed (*heracleum mantegazzianum*) around the lower areas of Even's Cliff

To allow for the removal of Himalayan balsam (*impatiens glandulifera*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) within the reed bed.

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