



Charmouth Parish Council Report – DEFRA Coastal Change Pathfinder Programme

1 INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared to provide background to the Coastal Change Pathfinder Project, more colloquially known as the Pathfinder Report for the Draft Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan.

2 COASTAL CHANGE PATHFINDER PROGRAMME

In 2009, HM Government's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) commissioned the 'Coastal Change Pathfinder Programme'.¹

The Coastal Change Pathfinder programme was launched in June 2009² to road-test new and innovative approaches to planning for and managing coastal change.³ Fifteen local authorities received nearly £11 million to deliver the programme⁴, the aims of which were to:

- improve understanding of how coastal communities can adapt to coastal change and the costs and benefits of these different approaches; and
- provide practical lessons and examples which can be shared with other practitioners, particularly on community adaptation planning and engagement and the delivery of adaptive solutions.

Nationally, the Programme began in December 2009 and the projects were intended to run until March 2011 although some individual projects continued beyond that end date.

Some £11M of funding was transferred to local authorities via a Section 31⁵ Grant determination process.

3 COASTAL CHANGE PATHFINDER REVIEW

A subsequent DEFRA⁶ report stated:

'Most of the Pathfinders have demonstrated an increased ability by communities to adapt whether it has been by raising their awareness of coastal change issues –which is the first stage of the 'adaptation journey' – or by starting to plan for change or by implementing specific adaptation solutions. Clearly, the ten smaller Pathfinders have generally only been able to tackle awareness raising and adaptation planning (e.g. Hampshire, Hastings, Jurassic Coast and Scratby⁷) due to the limited funds available,

¹ In PRINCE2 (a project management methodology widely used within Central Government organisations) a 'programme' is a collection of 'projects' which collectively deliver a programme, normally, of change.

² DEFRA (2009). Consultation on Coastal Change Policy. Defra, June 2009.

³ 'Coastal change' was defined in the Coastal Change Policy consultation document as 'physical change to the shoreline, i.e. erosion, coastal landslip, permanent inundation and coastal accretion'.

⁴ Dorset County Council received £376,500 to explore planning for, and managing, adaptation to coastal change on the 'Jurassic Coast'. This included the communities of Sidmouth, Charmouth, Seatown, Weymouth, Ringstead and Swanage.

⁵ Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 – Power for a Minister of the Crown to pay a discretionary grant to a local authority in England towards expenditure incurred or to be incurred by it. In Central Government circles known as 'Grant in Aid'.

⁶ DEFRA In House Policy Resource (IHPR)1 was commissioned in May 2011 to carry out a high level evaluation of Defra's Coastal Change Pathfinder Programme; Final Report, January 2012.

⁷ Scratby is north of Great Yarmouth.

while the larger five have been able to help individuals to implement solutions through rollback and other assistance.’⁸

Dealing specifically with the Jurassic Coast, the report states:

‘In the Jurassic Coast, communities were felt better able to adapt in the following key respects:

- Greater awareness of risk– as well as leading to practical steps to improve resilience, heightened awareness of risk also leads to better psychological preparedness to deal with risk (though this is perhaps more relevant in terms of flood risk).
- Planning for resilience– in Dorset, four of the six case study communities are now taking forward an emergency planning exercise with the support of their local authorities giving specific consideration to coastal change risk.
- Planning for long-term adaptation– in Dorset, some of the case study communities are beginning to look at relocating vulnerable assets. They will need further support, however, in assessing the feasibility of different options and finding the resources to adapt.’⁹

4 DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL ELEMENT

Dorset County Council used its Grant in Aid funding (£376,500) to explore planning for, managing, and adaptation to coastal change on the Jurassic Coast. The identified coastal change issue was that ‘coastal change’ has shaped the Jurassic Coast of East Devon as well as Dorset and its settlements have historically experienced a mix of coastal erosion and flooding risks. These risks are likely to be exacerbated by climate change which will add to the activity of change on a stretch of coast, which is already characterised by dramatic and unpredictable landslides and other erosion impacts. The challenge faced by Charmouth’s community is set out below, all of which is due to the change of policy within the SMP2¹⁰ from ‘Hold the Line’ to ‘Managed Realignment and/or No Active Intervention’ over the medium to long term:

‘The change in SMP policy will result in the damage, and ultimately loss, of a World Heritage visitor centre¹¹ and part of the car park, with change being through a catastrophic storm event rather than a gradual process. Cliff top properties will become increasingly at risk from erosion, including episodic landslips.’¹²

5 CHARMOUTH PATHFINDER REPORT

The Charmouth element of the Pathfinder Project was undertaken by NVB Architects and Heritage & Leisure Management. Their report¹³ states that the background to the report was:

‘During the ‘Jurassic Coast Coastal Change Pathfinder Project: Charmouth Scenario Planning’ process a number of key challenges were identified that the community faced over the coming years as a result of its unique relationship to coastal change. During the initial workshops a number of key issues were identified as being significant including:

1. Loss of Heritage Centre.
2. Closure or partial loss of car parking facilities.

⁸ DEFRA ‘Coastal Change Pathfinder Review January 2012 - Para 4.81

⁹ *ibid* Para 4.82

¹⁰ South Devon and Dorset Coastal Authorities Group (2011) ‘Shoreline Management Plan No 2 (SMP2)

¹¹ This is the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre which is located within the first floor of the Old Cement Factory owned by Charmouth Parish Council.

¹² *ibid* Annex I

¹³ NVB Architects and Heritage & Leisure Management (2012), *Jurassic Coast Pathfinder Project Research Study for Charmouth Parish Council*, Document Issue D

3. Damage to Charmouth Primary School.
4. Damage to footbridge.
5. Restricted access to the beach.
6. Loss of toilets and café.
7. Loss of beach amenity (risk of landslides etc.).
8. Evacuation of residents.
9. Loss and damage to residential property.

The items on this were expanded more fully in a number of workshops under the following key headings:

1. Relocation of the Heritage Centre.
2. More focus on possible tourism.
3. A survey of why visitors come to Charmouth.
4. Develop an emergency response plan for Charmouth.¹⁴

The report centres its review on the impact of coastal change on The Old Cement Factory, which they term as the 'Heritage Centre', should there be a 'once in thirty year storm' in the Charmouth locality. The conclusion is that it would cause considerable damage to the current sea defence wall resulting in the loss of the promenade and the Old Cement Factory, which houses (on the second floor) the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre.

Figure 1 (below) from the report¹⁵ identifies the 'Heritage Centre' as being within the flood risk zone. In fact The Old Factory Building is in Flood Risk Zone 1¹⁶ and 2¹⁷

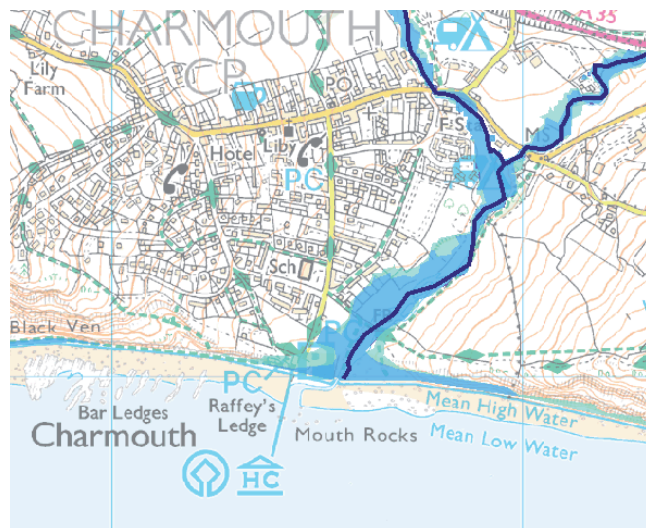


Figure 1 – Extract from Environment Agency showing areas of flood risk

¹⁴ ibid Section 'Background'.

¹⁵ ibid Page 8

¹⁶ Flood Risk Zone 1 is land assessed as having a less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding (<0.1%).

¹⁷ Flood Risk Zone 2 is land assessed as having between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river flooding (1% – 0.1%), or between a 1 in 200 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of sea flooding (0.5% – 0.1%) in any year.



Figure 2 – Charmouth plan showing (the then) local development boundary (WDDC)¹⁸

The report identifies that the Heritage Centre and all of the identified possible alternative development sites are outside the current local development boundary and this issue would need to be addressed in any of the proposed development plans.



Figure 3 - 3D model of Charmouth from the SE showing path of River Char & Heritage Centre location.

¹⁸ A revised local development boundary was adopted by West Dorset District Council in 2015. Additionally, as a requirement of The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole (Structural Changes) Order 2018, Dorset Council has commenced consultations for a revised Local Plan for adoption by 2023, which may well change the current local development boundary for the Charmouth settlement.

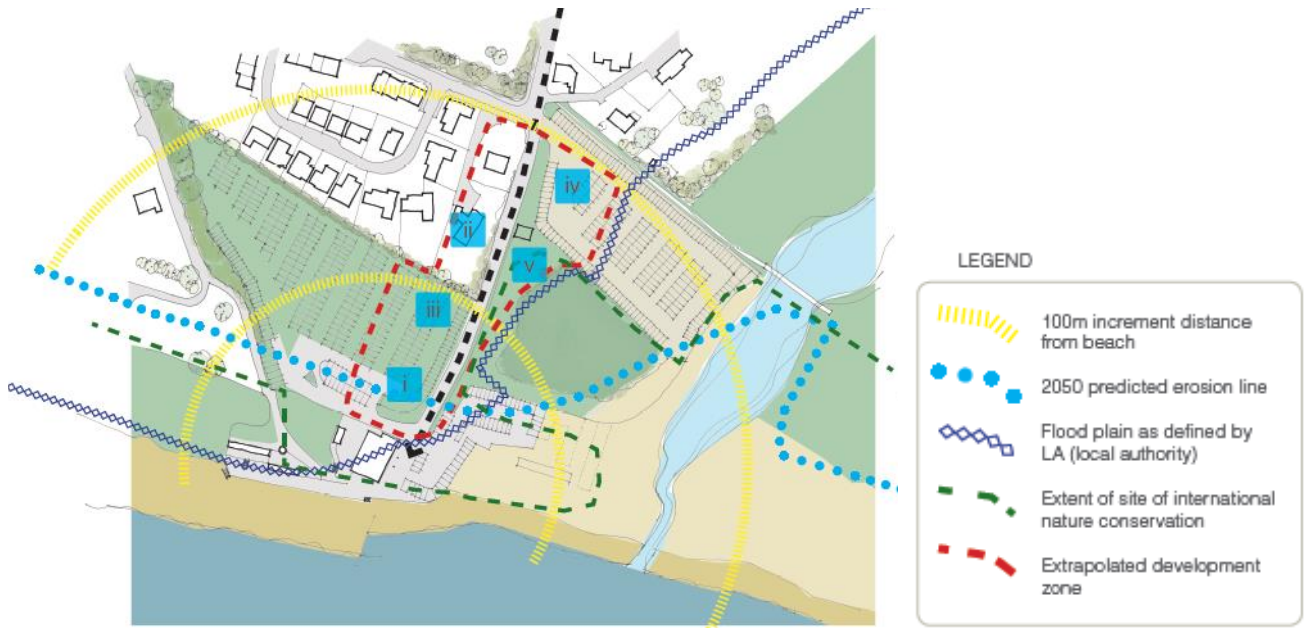
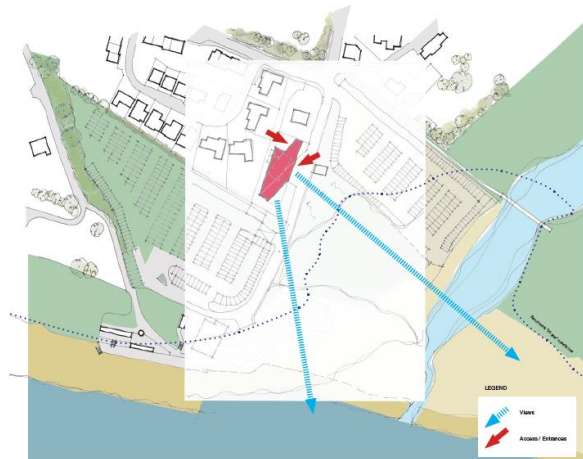
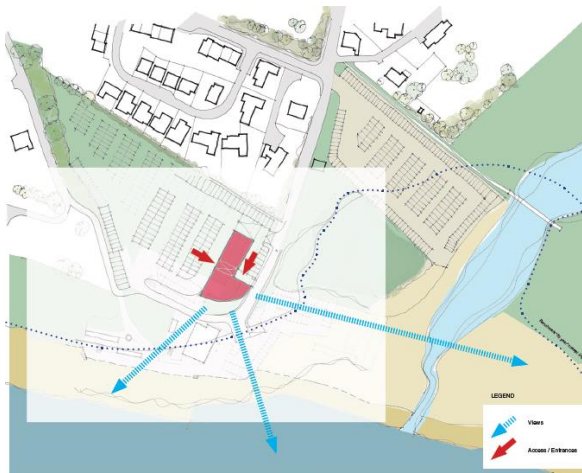
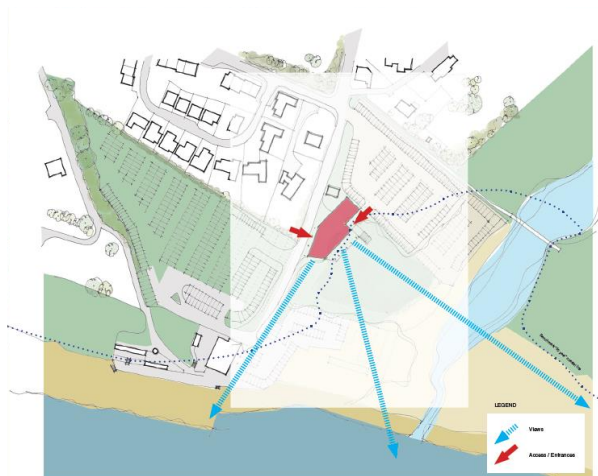
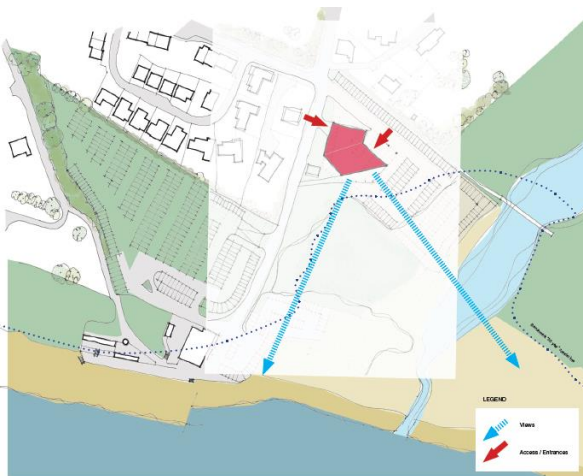


Figure 4 – Map extract showing key drivers for potential new centre location

The report concludes by identifying four sites for the Heritage Centre to relocate to:



Option 1 - The Field Car Park, Lower Sea Lane¹⁹ Option 2 – Greystones etc., Lower Sea Lane,



Option 4 - The Gravel Car Park, Lower Sea Lane

Option 5 - The Reed Bed, Lower Sea Lane

¹⁹ Options 1 and 3 are two different options centred on the Field Car Park

6 CHARMOUTH PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council discussed the report a number of times. All the options would have significant issues should the Parish Council wished to pursue any of them.

The Field Car Park and the Gravel Car Park options would incur significant costs to acquire the land at market rates. The Greystones/Coach House option again would incur significant cost to acquire, assuming the current owners would be willing to sell their homes and the associated business.

The Reed Bed, which is to the north of the Parish Council's car park was the only option that involved Parish Council owned land. However, the proposed site is outside the development boundary identified by the local authority and also within the official flood plain as well as within the 'sites of International Nature Conservation' (SA8) designation.²⁰

The Parish Council sought legal advice about possible enforcement of the covenant having regard to a number of factors. The advice given was that the covenant was enforceable.

Following the publishing of the report there was a complaint, from one of the land owners, the Parish Council discussed the issues at its September 2014 meeting and resolved that:

- (i) Charmouth Parish Council will never infringe the covenants of the Evans Cliff conveyance or any other covenants;
- (ii) The idea of building a new Heritage Centre over the reed bed is therefore now withdrawn;
- (iii)²¹

7 CONCLUSIONS

The Programme which was launched in June 2009 had a stated aim at HMG level 'to road-test new and innovative approaches to planning for and managing coastal change'. Although not overtly linked to the change of HMG's policy regarding the impact of erosion and coastal defence systems with the adoption of Shoreline Management Plan No 2 (SMP2) there is a clear linkage between the creation of 'new and innovative approaches to planning for and managing coastal change' envisaged in the Coastal Change Pathfinder Programme to offset the impact of a fundamental change in HMG's sea defence management policy from 'Hold the Line' to 'Managed Realignment and/or No Active Intervention' over the medium to long term in many less urban areas. This was clearly identified by Dorset County Council in the manner that they used its Grant in Aid funding to explore planning for, managing, and adaptation to coastal change on the Jurassic Coast.

In terms of the project in Charmouth the process of the consultation and the production of the report appeared, in hindsight, to be a PR exercise to attempt to inform the community about the impact of SMP2 policy change and the production of a mitigation plan. The extensive public consultation was, in many peoples' opinion, a PR exercise and the resultant report centres on a mitigation option analysis for the one building (The Old Cement Factory) affected by the possible impact of a once in thirty year storm on the Charmouth coast line.

The report received much derision in the village from many fronts.

The funding for development of an alternative site quite rightly is identified as an issue in the report. Whilst the report identified that the Parish Council in 2012 had reserves of '£146,693.33 with £35,394.15 held in the reserves for foreshore repairs and renewals/maintenance and

²⁰ ibid Page 42

²¹ Minutes of Charmouth Parish Council meeting held on 24th September 2014

enhancement.²², the report makes an implied assumption that all the reserves would be made available for possible 'match funding' should the village be successful in applying for grants from any of a number of sources mentioned within the report. The assumption is ill founded. This is because, other than 'working funds' to meet the day to day cash flow requirements of the Parish Council, most of the reserves are 'earmarked' for either: specific projects; funding for long periodic high expenditure repairs or reserves set aside for large unexpected expenditures, e.g. storm damage.²³

The report does not provide a plan to deal with the other elements identified in 'Background Section' of the Pathfinder Report (see Section 5 of this Annex (commencing on page 2), notably: (a) damage to Charmouth Primary School and (b) Loss and damage to residential property.

7.1.1 Options 1, 3 and 4 – Field and Gravel Car Parks

The cost of land acquisition of either of the two car parks (Field or Gravel Car Parks)(Options 1, 3 and 4) was beyond the Parish Council's financial resources. Speculative indications at the time suggested that the car parks had a price ticket of about £1M.

7.1.2 Option 2 – Greystones and the Coach House

The owner of one of the houses identified in Option 2 was particularly indignant at the suggestion of their home being purchased from them.

7.1.3 Option 5 – Reed Bed

Option 5 is the only option that used existing Parish Council owned land. However, a number of residents were particularly concerned about the suggestion of building either over or on the land which is a reed bed, within a SSSI.

In the Parish Council's view, the Report failed to take fully into account within the Reed Bed option analysis the important factors which render the option as not being viable, namely that the location was within a SSSI²⁴ and being part of the designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC)²⁵. Any proposed development would require the approval of Natural England. Additionally, there is a restrictive covenant affecting the use of the land.^{26 & 27}, which would prohibit the construction of a centre or its use.

During a post report meeting with the consultants, they suggested that the designation of SSSI would not be a significant planning issue in the event of the current building housing the Heritage

²² Ibid Page 34

²³ The damage to the foreshore and The Old Cement Factory caused by storms over the winter of 2013/14 involved the expenditure of over £90k from the Parish Council's reserves before the insurance claims were settled. A process that took over almost 12 months. The net cost to the Parish Council of the damage was over £20k, but without the reserves the foreshore would have been in a state of disrepair for a whole season until the insurance company funded the repairs. The longer term economic impact on tourism would have been significant.

²⁴ West Dorset Coast Units 56 & 57

²⁵ Part of the SAC between Sidmouth and West Bay

²⁶ The following causes are of significance:

- 1) Nothing to be done to or upon the land which would alter its present natural state.
- 2) No trade to be carried-on on the land other than: (i) the grazing of cattle sheep or goats; and (ii) the selling of refreshments at the hut mentioned in paragraph (b) of Clause 6,
- 3) No meeting to be allowed on the land whether religious political or of any other kind,
- 6) No buildings or erections of any kind on the land to be allowed...(the allowable items do not relate to the Reed Bed'; and
- 7) Not to be used or permit anything to be done on the said land which may be a nuisance or annoyance to residents or visitors.

²⁷ A copy of the land deeds was given to the consultants during the consultation period.

Centre being destroyed in a storm. This is a cogent argument post a possible catastrophic storm event. However, the Parish Council believes the SSSI status would be a significant issue should the Parish Council wish to apply for planning consent before the loss of The Old Cement Factory to maintain continuity for the Heritage Centre's operations.

7.2 The Future

The report states:

'Some funders such as HLF²⁸ are more certain, particularly in the short to medium term, other funding schemes come and go it is important to be aware of what new funding is available and be in a position to apply for it. However especially with a heritage project the experience at Charmouth and more recently at projects at Chesil and Durlston have shown the vital importance of securing at least 50% of a project's costs from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This obviously significantly reduces the target for match funding but also provides vital reassurance to other funders.

Therefore it is recommended that discussions with HLF occur updating them on this feasibility work and how it will be progressed in the future.

Outline business case to show how each option might be funded and sustained in future is considered at the end of the options.²⁹

7.3 Recommendations

The report makes the following recommendation:

'The current Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre is financially viable despite increased pressure on budgets from reducing grants and reductions in visitor spend. The Centre and its staff and volunteers provide a vital and wonderful service to visitors to Charmouth unlocking many a child's imagination and invoking a lifelong fascination with fossils.

The Centre's trustee's, staff and volunteers are under large amounts of time pressure but despite this have aspirations to continue to improve the service offered.

To help address this further resources are required to provide additional staff time and facilitate new projects. It's therefore important to help enable this that sufficient resources from the day to day tasks are allocated to reviewing and developing for example the retail offer and to seek new sources of revenue grant funding.³⁰

8 ACTIVITIES POST PUBLICATION OF THE REPORT

8.1 Charmouth Parish Council

8.1.1 Community Reaction

The recommendations of the report became more and more discredited the more the Parish Council looked at the options and recommendations within the report. Following a number of complaints and observations the Parish Council has not taken forward any of the option.

²⁸ Heritage Lottery Fund

²⁹ ibid Page 35

³⁰ ibid Page 35

8.1.2 Emergency Planning

However, the Parish Council has formed an ‘Emergency Committee’ to managed the disaster before Dorset Council resources arrive, as a Category 1 Responder³¹, using what resources are with the village and to be the focal point for the community when the emergency services assume responsibility and to assist Dorset Council with the recovery phase where possible.

8.1.3 West Beach

The Parish Council has become increasingly concerned generally about the quality of the amenities around foreshore area and particularly the poor access to the beach particularly for those with impaired mobility. The Parish Council has commissioned a number of studies, one of which has been the proposal for a beach stepped access ramp in front of the sea defence wall at the West Beach³².

Whilst the beach stepped access ramp will not form part of the sea defence structure, one of the unintended outcomes will be that the structure, as well as additional rock armour around the ramp, in front of the eastern end of the sea defence wall will curb some of the direct onslaught of the sea on the defence wall at the eastern end, which appears to have suffered increasing damage through the scouring effect of the sea.

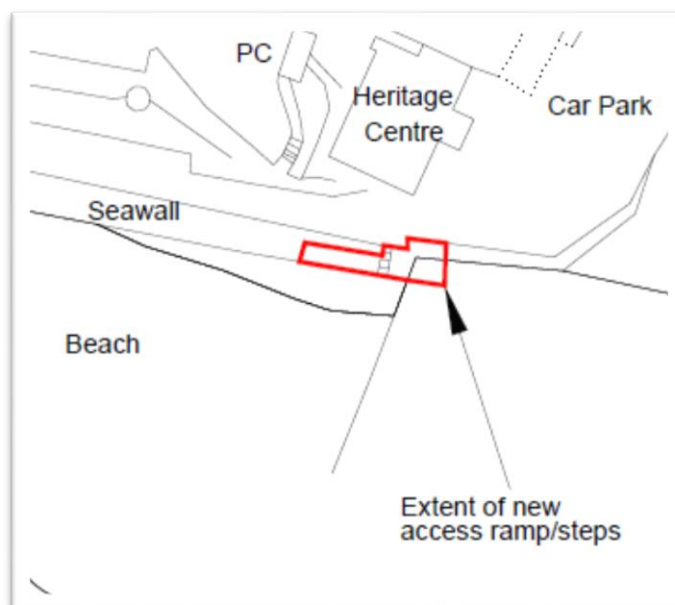


Figure 5 – Location of Proposed Beach Access Stepped Ramp

³¹ Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Schedule 1 Category 1 and 2 Responders, Part 1 Category 1 Responders: General

³² The beach to the south of The Old Cement Factory which houses not only the Heritage Centre, but includes the West Beach Café and other retail outlets.

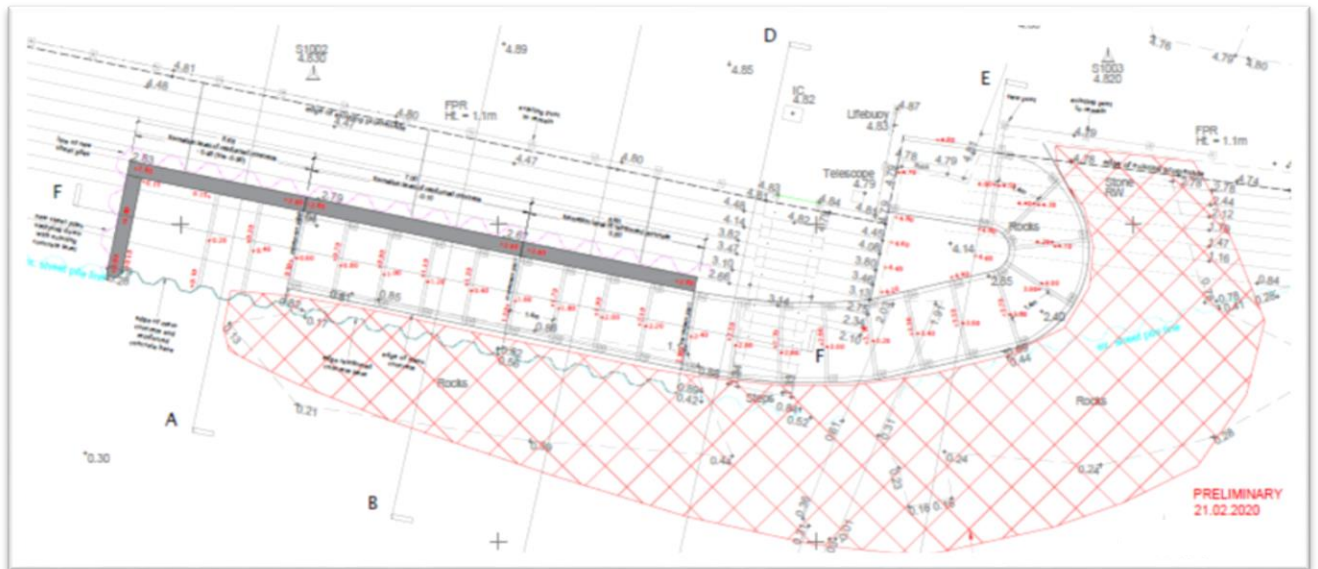


Figure 6 – Plan of Proposed Beach Access Stepped Ramp

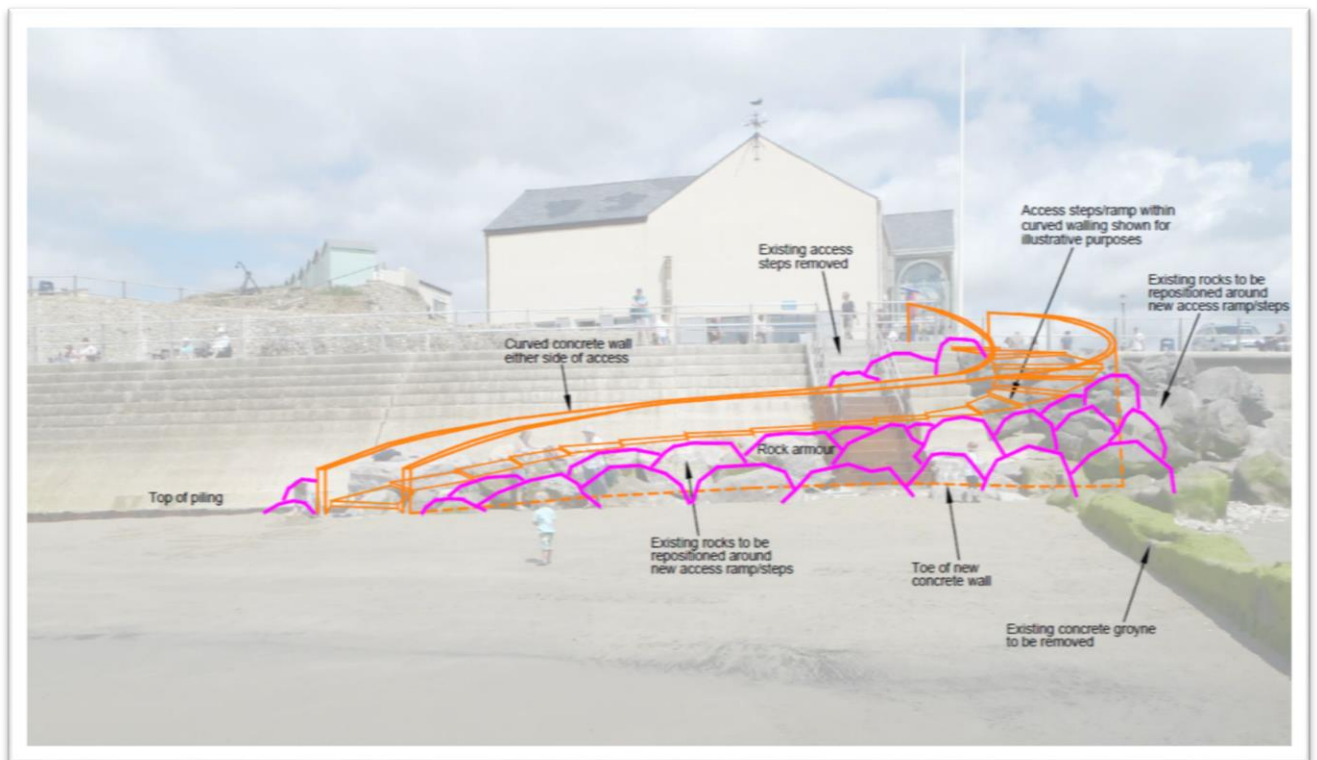


Figure 7 – Schematic View of the Proposed Beach Stepped Access Ramp from the Sea

In 2017 Parish Council obtained planning consent for the beach stepped access ramp³³. The Environment Agency has provided ‘grant in aid’ funding to Dorset Council³⁴ to develop the plans into a constructional specification with a bill of quantities, suitable for tendering once funding has been secured.

³³ Planning Application WD/D/17/002476

³⁴ Originally, the offer of ‘Grant in aid’ was made to West Dorset District Council, with functions transferred as of 1st April 2019 to Dorset Council (vide The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole (Structural Changes) Order 2018, Statutory Instruments 2018 No. 648 (S.I. 2019/648))

An unsuccessful funding application was made in 2019 to the Coastal Community Fund invited by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. The Parish Council intends to submit a further application when invitations are invited for the 2020 Coastal Community Fund.

The estimated cost of the project costs are in the order of £400k

The Parish Council has been setting aside funds, in an ear marked reserve, to fund further studies and to provide some match funding, should it be successful in a funding application.

8.2 Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre

The main recommendation of the report suggests that the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC) should take forward the main recommendation.

The Trustees of the Centre have made the following contribution to this Annex:

We have addressed the one recommendation the report makes for the CHCC by developing an emergency plan to be used should the building become unsafe due to weather or coastal erosion. This contingency plan will allow us to continue operating in the short term. We intend to start reviewing our longer term future later this year.

Since the Coastal Change Pathfinder report was published, the CHCC has gone from strength to strength, with an exceptional year in 2018, when visitor numbers reached record highs of 150,000. These figures were enhanced due to good weather, the Brexit effect, the display of the Attenborough Sea Dragon, the BBC broadcast of the discovery of the Sea Dragon, the visit of the replica head of Dippy the Diplodocus, and several filming events including BBC 4's broadcast of "Beach Live".

Since 2015, (disregarding 2018 as a "spike" year), shop sales have increased, income from our fossil walks (public and schools) have increased, donations and gift aid income has increased, grants have decreased. Our grant from Dorset Council is secure for 2020-2021, but uncertain beyond that date. Our retail space has been increased and we are now VAT registered, which reflects the increase in the turnover of our shop.

Since November 2019, we have increased our total number of full time wardens to 4. This year we have one seasonal warden employed from January to the end of October.

Improvements over the years have included the addition of museum standard display cabinets which have in turn enhanced the quality and quantity of fossil specimens on show to the public. Refurbishment continues year on year due to our hard working and enthusiastic winter working party. A new display about environmental issues including plastic pollution should be ready for Easter 2020.

Increasing income streams is always high on our agenda. We have tapped into the cruise market offering walks for passengers from ships at Portland. We have experimented in offering fossil walks at different times of the year and the week, although we are constrained by the tides and weather. We are developing a schools' outreach programme. Donations and Gift Aid are continuing to increase year on year, and we are advancing opportunities for increasing donations further by updating donation boxes and investigating possibilities for cashless donations. We continue to have free entry for the public.

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre continues to be a successful educational charity. This is due to the hard work and enthusiasm of our staff, volunteers and trustees. We always strive to provide our public with an understanding of the geology, palaeontology,

geomorphology and natural history and management of the coast adjacent to Charmouth. The encouraging, complementary and appreciative comments that frequently appear on Trip Advisor show that we are having some success in achieving this.

9 THE WAY FOREWORD

The Parish Council wishes to support any viable proposal to safeguard the current alignment of the foreshore and retain the Old Cement Building as the Coast Heritage Centre for reasons of tourism to sustain the coastal economy, thus not only preserving the villages heritage, but preserving employment and opportunities for the local population.