

Charmouth Parish Council



Foreshore Assent Document

Preface

The Charmouth Foreshore Assent Document has been drafted to create a permission document that is agreed by all parties involved with the foreshore at Charmouth. The previous process of applying for ad-hoc permissions for individual pieces of intervention, proved difficult in terms of understanding the separate authorities' requirements and is sometimes a slow process in fast moving circumstances. This led to the creation of the Charmouth Beach Management Plan which gave permission from 2016 until 2022. This review has taken place to keep the document up to date and to include any improvements to it that have been suggested.

It has been decided to change the name from Beach Management Plan to the Foreshore Assent Document to make clearer the purpose of the document. It is a plan that creates order, understanding, control and discipline whenever the Parish Council, as the landowner, believes it is appropriate to intervene in order to manage nature's process, whether it be for the benefit of public safety, sustaining the biodiversity or maintaining the habitat. This Foreshore Assent Document is a control and permission document for permitted works to the physical aspect of the Foreshore.

The application of this Foreshore Assent Document will be for a five-year period commencing 2022 and the Parish Council looks forward to a continuing working relationship with the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, Dorset Council and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team.

We are grateful for the assistance and guidance in creating the original document from Richard Warren of Natural England; Richard Edmonds formally of Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team; Sam Scriven of Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team and councillors on Charmouth Parish Council's Foreshore Committee. We are also grateful to Alison Appleby of Natural England and all that have been involved in this review.

Judith Sheppard
Chair of Foreshore Committee
Charmouth Parish Council

March 2022

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Foreshore Assent Document (FAD) sets out the Parish Council's proposals for the day-to-day management of the foreshore at Charmouth for the next five years (until 2027) in consultation with the various interested parties including the Environmental Agency, Natural England, and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team.

The Foreshore Assent Document was approved by resolution of Charmouth Parish Council at a meeting held on 22nd March 2022.

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 (see figure 1).

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.

2.2 World Heritage Status

On the 13th of December 2001, the undeveloped cliffs and beaches between Orcombe Point near Exmouth in East Devon and Studland Bay near Poole in Dorset were inscribed on the World Heritage List by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The Site was granted World Heritage Status under UNESCO's criteria viii - Earth's history and geological features - which indicated that its geology, palaeontology, and geomorphology are of Outstanding Universal Value.

The purpose of the World Heritage List is to identify properties that have "*Outstanding Universal Value*"; a "*cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity*".

Those responsible for managing World Heritage properties have a “*common obligation*” to ensure that they are protected for present and future generations, not just through legal means, but through responsible, inclusive, and sustainable management practices. This is the primary reason why a World Heritage Site must have an appropriate, agreed management framework in place. ¹ <https://jurassiccoast.org/what-is-the-jurassic-coast/world-heritage/looking-after-the-jurassic-coast/jurassic-coast-partnership-plan/>

The coastal SSSIs are a key statutory tool used to protect the World Heritage Site. See section 2.5 for more details on the SSSIs relevant to this document and the geological interests they include.

2.3 Fossil Collecting

Collectors have been finding and rescuing the great majority of important fossils from the cliffs and beaches of Dorset and East Devon for over 200 years and continue to play this essential role in the management of the World Heritage Site. Without their intervention, most fossils, once exposed by the effects of weathering in the cliffs and erosion by the sea, would inevitably be damaged or destroyed sooner or later by those same processes. The Jurassic Coast partnership and Charmouth Parish Council supports the continued management of collecting at Charmouth in ways that, in general, follow Natural England’s principles on responsible collecting, and our own additional requirements as landowners. To this end the Parish Council asks fossil hunters to abide by The West Dorset Fossil Collecting Code of Conduct. <https://charmouth.org/chcc/the-fossil-collecting-code/>

2.4 Protection of Biodiversity

The Charmouth Parish Council are aware of the critical importance of the ant hills, bramble areas, reed bed margins and the reed bed for providing a key environment for slow worms, adders, lizards (increasingly rare) migrating and nesting birds, and the need to increase the insect populations. Our working practices reflect this.

¹ This document contains links to external third-party websites to help you find information that may be relevant to you quickly and easily. The Council does not control, approve or endorse these sites or the information contained therein. Nor does the Council control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of the information contained in them. These links are provided solely as a service for visitors’ information and convenience. If you access (or provide information to) any of the external websites linked to, you do so entirely at your own risk and the Council accepts no responsibility for any loss or damage that you may suffer as a result.

Figure 1 - An indication of the lands owned by Charmouth Parish Council at the Foreshore



2.5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

The whole of the Foreshore land owned by the Parish Council identified in Figure 2 (on page 11) is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). SSSI is a conservation designation denoting a protected area within the United Kingdom. The legal framework 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). Natural England is the body governing activities that relate to SSSI designated sites.

Designation affords a high level of protection which, combined with planning policy, should provide long term security for the natural values of the World Heritage Site.

The SSSI sites are known as ‘West Dorset Coast Units 8, 56 & 57’.

Units 56 and 57 are also part of the Designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the area between Sidmouth and West Bay. Unit 8 is not part of the SAC.

2.5.1 JNCC’s General Description of the Area

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee describes ‘General Site Character’ for this area as <https://sac.jncc.gov.uk/site/UK0019864>

- 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 8 - Hayfield

Main Habitat - NEUTRAL GRASSLAND – Lowland

Assessment Date: 19/07/2008 - Assessment Description: Favourable

2 separate parcels, same unit

Unit comprising two small areas of grassland in between southern side of Charmouth and the eastern end of the Black Ven landslip. The western area is contiguous with and affected by the landslips (a coastal footpath has been closed here due to landslips) and the natural processes create open ground suitable for colonisation by plants and uncommon invertebrates. Black medick, bristly ox-tongue, bird's-foot trefoil and glaucous sedge are frequent, eyebright, fleabane, common centaury and hoary ragwort occasional, and teasel and carline thistle rare. The garden throw-out Shasta daisy is locally frequent on the slope. The eastern area is also contiguous with undercliffs but less affected by landslips at time of visit and supports locally frequent wild carrot, common knapweed and bird's-foot trefoil with occasional fleabane and agrimony. Rabbit grazing occurs near the cliff edge but the inland part of the unit is becoming somewhat rank and mowing with removal of cuttings would be beneficial, as grazing by livestock is impractical on the site.

Latest Assessment Date: 21/06/2021

Current Condition: Favourable

Predicted condition(s) if current management continues: Favourable

Presence of +/- indicator species (indicate in bold), general species list

Eastern parcel : BFT, plantain, bristly oxtongue, yarrow, speedwell, sorrel, creeping cinquefoil, meadow vetchling, knapweed.

Western parcel: BFT, knapweed, ox eye daisy, bristly oxtongue

Monitored feature assessment/ general site description – (feature by feature description or general narrative):

Eastern parcel currently strimmed once/year by CPC. Largely open, unfenced, natural, some scrub but not encroaching as they tackle the suckering blackthorn. A little more diligence is needed with the strimming of areas near the anthills as CPC raised concerns that some damage had been inflicted by previous management by contractors. CPC don't currently collect the arisings therefore cutting and collecting method (with wooden rakes) will help the botanical diversity increase. On similar habitat on the Undercliffs NNR, a similar management technique occurs on similar habitat in mid Sept of each year so we would recommend similar timing here.

CPC feedback for eastern parcel: Feedback on management of ant hills and need to strim carefully and rake arisings. Sward generally better in diversity on coastal side of footpath – possibly due to coastal influence. Also, rabbit influence/wild herbivores keeping the sward down and less grass dominated. Some footpaths coming in from adjacent properties but not in high number and not affecting site integrity.

Unit 56- Charmouth Coast West

Main Habitat: SUPRALITTORAL ROCK

Assessment Date: 22/10/2010

Assessment Description: Favourable

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, 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.

Latest Assessment Date 08/06/2021

Current Condition: Favourable

Predicted condition(s) if current management continues: Favourable

Monitored feature assessment/ general site description – (feature by feature description or general narrative):

Natural processes continuing. No human intervention other than historic defences around the Old Cement Factory building/car park. Management of grassland in accordance with management plan. Cut and collect so positive. Appears to be diverse sward. Reedbed appears to be under management also. Margins of reedbed were rich in flag iris at time of visit. Japanese Knotweed appears to have been eradicated since last site check. Cliff face under natural processes, abundant BFT in slopes, exposed geology. Actively moving at toe. A footpath has been lost within the unit at the top of the slope through slope movement.

Presence of +/- indicator species (indicate in bold), general species list:

Given management (frequent cutting), difficult to see positive indicators but no negative indicators evident either. Site managed in accordance with management plan.

Comments, actions going forward, follow up feedback for the owner:

CPC owned and managed in accordance with management plan.

Unit 57 - Charmouth Coast East

Main Habitat: SUPRALITTORAL ROCK

Assessment Date: 22/10/2010

Assessment Description: Favourable

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.

Latest Assessment Date: 21/06/2021:

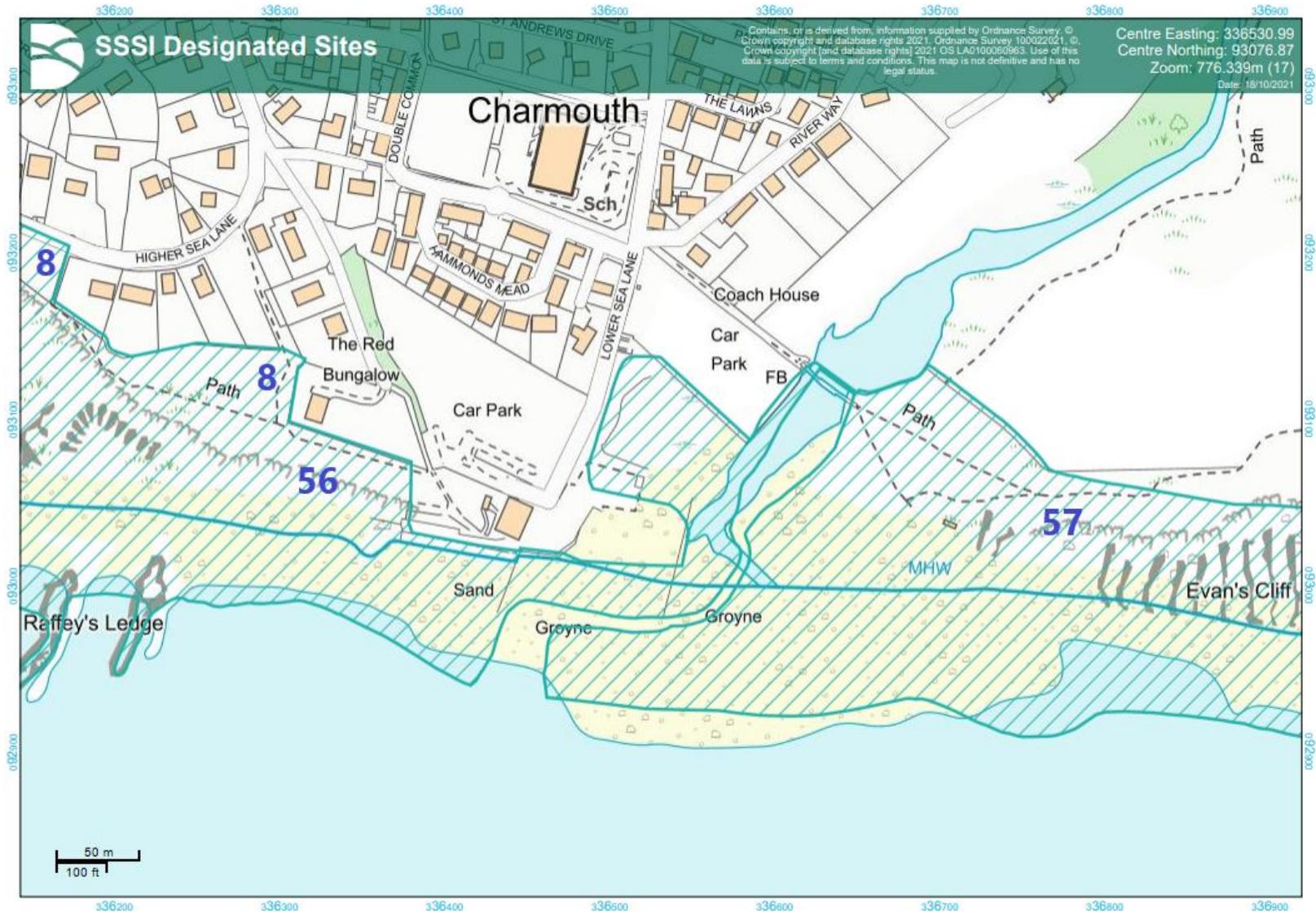
Current Condition: Favourable

Predicted condition(s) if current management continues: Favourable

Natural processes being allowed to occur, with active movements evident. Some of the earth movements are now occurring outside of the SSSI at the eastern end of the unit. The lower area of the unit at the western end is regularly cut in accordance with the Charmouth Beach management plan.

Natural England have also commented that "Of particular interest in relation to the Foreshore Assent Document are the reed bed and the grassed lands on Evan's Cliff and to the west of the Old Cement Factory building."

Figure 2 – Map showing Charmouth and the designated sites of SSSI



2.5.2 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 been granted licence to cut a quarter of the reed bed each year and the straw to be burnt in situ, in the autumn. This ensures areas of open water are maintained.

There is also a requirement for a safe area around the perimeter of reed bed to allow safe access, for the sluice gate to be made visible for safety reasons and to limit the spread of the reeds into the surrounding hedge. Permission has also been granted by Natural England for the planting of 110m of mixed species hedging along the margin of the reed bed.

2.5.3 Grassed Lands

The grassed areas are managed to different levels as appropriate for achieving a balance of use by residents and visitors and keeping areas for wildlife.

Wildlife areas are managed by occasional or minimal intervention to maintain access routes through and contain brambles, to prevent them spreading into the grasslands whilst preserving areas of thicket for nesting, foraging and refuge. Maintenance of these areas is restricted to during seasons and weather that does not impact upon nesting and roosting or birds and basking of reptiles. This will mostly be winter maintenance or very late autumn, except for cutting back of growth across footpaths.

Recreation areas are managed by keeping grass short on an appropriate mowing frequency for practical access for seating, picnicking and games.

The lands beyond the Lookout station (marked as letter 'A' in Figure 1, on page 6) requires cutting annually. Ant hills are present in this area and so the area is cut lightly with a strimmer, not mown. Particular care is taken to avoid damage/cutting in to the ant hills. Ideally arising should be gently raked up from around the ant hills and disposed of off-site/off SSSI where possible. Wooden rakes are to be used to minimise damage.

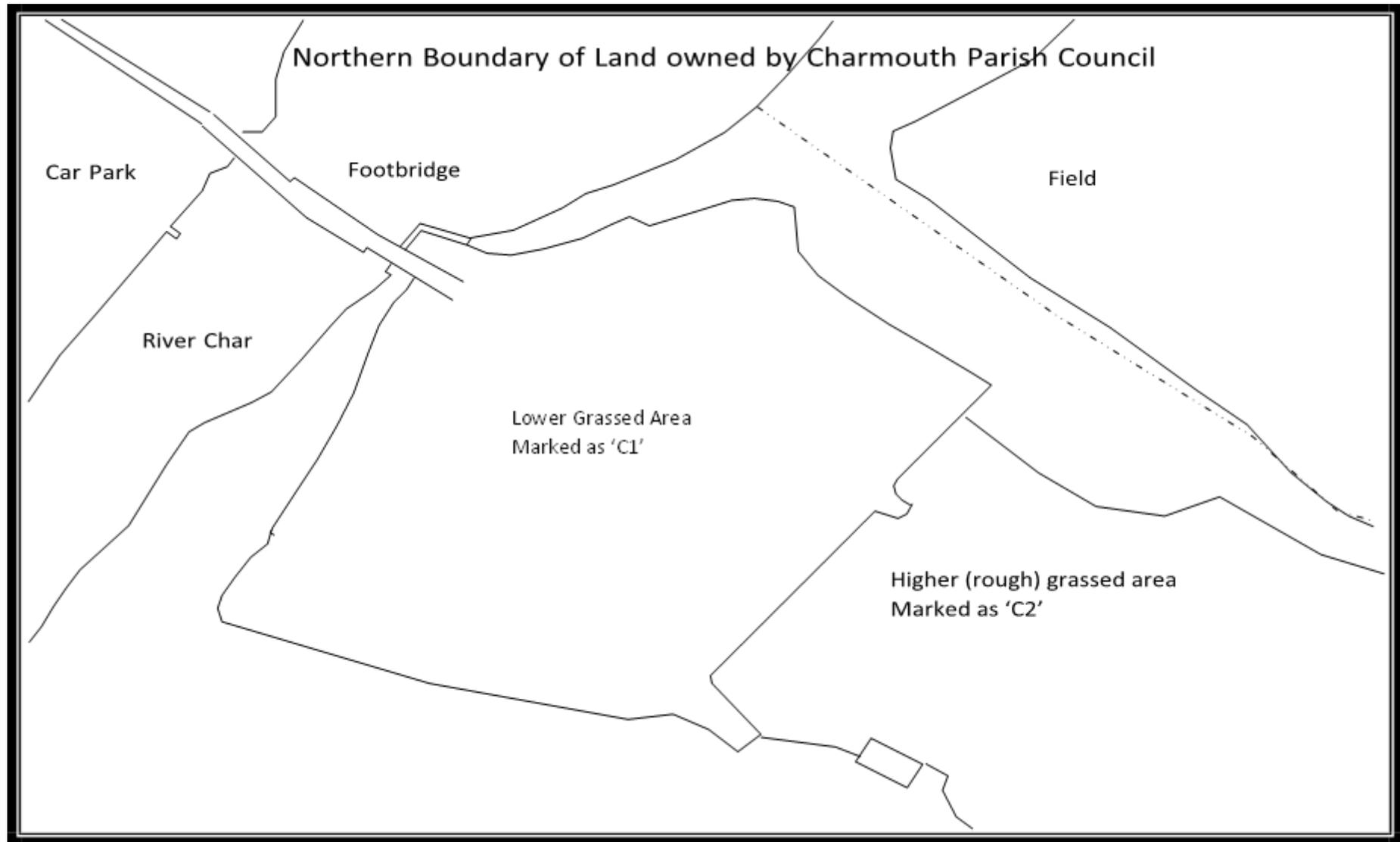
The grassed area near the Lookout station (marked as letter 'B' in Figure 1, on page 6) requires cutting fortnightly during the summer season.

The grassed lands identified as letter 'C' Figure 1 (on page 6) requires cutting as follows:

The lower grass land on Evan's Cliff requires cutting fortnightly during the summer season. The land is identified as letter 'C1' in Figure 3 (on page 13). This is a landing area for emergency use helicopters.

The higher (rough) grassed area requires cutting twice a year. The land is identified as letter 'C2' in Figure 3 (on page 13).

Figure 3 – Detail Areas of Grass Cutting on Evans Cliff



2.5.4 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 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 riverbed to ensure that its meandering does not go further to the west.

However, with the longshore drift² 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 Café. This resulted in a risk to the 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 remove the structures to ensure the river's flow and thus allowing fish from the sea access to the fresh water.

During the storms of October 2021 high tides and high river levels, caused huge quantities of pebbles and shingles to the east side of the concrete retaining groyne to be washed away. This created a localised void beneath the groyne and an associated void on the beach side of the groyne and permission was granted to fill the area with shingle to stabilise. If this should reoccur this could again create a risk of localised collapse and it is imperative that any such holes are filled as soon as possible.

2.6 Foreshore

2.6.1 Tank Traps

During the early part of the Second World War several 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 weighed more than 5 tonnes. (Most ordinary tank traps were of a simple pyramid shaped structure constructed in concrete.)

² 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.

There are several 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 Council's archaeologist has suggested that they should not be moved. On occasions the anti-tank traps have presented significant safety hazards. Notwithstanding the advice from Dorset Council, in these cases it has been necessary to either re-bury or relocate the anti-tank traps.

2.6.2 Public Access Ramps

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 present 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. There can be a genuine risk to the public of being unable to exit the beach during high tides.

3 FORESHORE PERMISSIONS

Permission is sought to manage the foreshore for the next five years until 2027 as follows:

3.1 Reed Bed

To cut a quarter of the reed bed each year and the straw to be taken away for composting or as a last resort burnt in situ. This to be carried out in the autumn, thus ensuring the area is appropriately managed minimising the disturbance to the possible wildlife 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. Hedging / trees around the area can be cut back during the autumn / winter where branches are encroaching.

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

3.2.1 Concrete groyne west of the river char

Undermining of the groyne, putting it at risk of collapse and creating a deep void can occur suddenly as it did in October 2021. This is likely to occur again. When it does, voids under and at the rear of the wall need to be filled with shingle as soon as possible to make them safe and to reduce the risk of a section of the groyne being lost. Material for this is to be collected by 'grazing' small amounts in the vicinity.

3.3 Anti-tank Traps

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

³ The Shoreline Management Plan (SMP2) for the area between Durlston Head to Rame Head 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.

3.4 Public Access Ramps

To maintain public routes to and from the beaches, ensuring safe access. Material for the ramps is to be collected by 'grazing' small amounts of sand and gravel 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.

3.5 Grassed Lands

- a) The lower grass land (marked as 'C1' in Figure 3 [on page 13] on Evan's Cliff to be cut not more frequently than fortnightly during the summer season.
- b) The higher grassed areas (marked as 'C2' in Figure 3 [on page 13]) 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 lands beyond the Lookout station (marked a letter 'A' Figure 1 [on page 6]) requires to be cut annually. Ant hills areas are to be cut lightly with a trimmer, not mown. Particular care is to be taken to avoid damage/cutting in to the ant hills. Ideally arising should be gently raked up from around the ant hills and disposed of off-site/off SSSI where possible. Wooden rakes are to be used to minimise damage.
- d) The grassed area near the Lookout station (marked as letter 'B' in Figure 1 [on page 6]) to be cut not more frequently than fortnightly 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.

3.6 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 Foreshore Assent Document.

3.7 Control of Invasive Plants

To allow for the control and removal of invasive species such as giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) known to be within the foreshore area. The work involved in the removal of invasive plants to be carried out in line with advice from the appropriate professional bodies.

Wessex Area Support Team
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Tel: 0300 600 3900
Email: wessexareateam@naturalengland.org.uk



Melissa Kirkby
deputy.clerk@charmouthparishcouncil.gov.uk

Our Ref: 2403221700CW
Your Ref: SSSI Site check templates -
West Dorset Coast units 56 and 57
Date: 19/05/2022

Dear Charmouth Parish Council

**West Dorset Coast SSSI
ASSENT OF NATURAL ENGLAND UNDER SECTION 28H OF THE WILDLIFE AND
COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981 (AS AMENDED)**

Natural England assents to the operations specified in your notice of 24/03/2022 under S28H of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) as attached.

In summary:

The Charmouth Foreshore Assent Document has been drafted to create a permission document that is agreed by all parties involved with the foreshore at Charmouth. It is a plan that creates order, understanding, control and discipline whenever the Parish Council, as the landowner, believes it is appropriate to intervene in order to manage nature's process, whether it be for the benefit of public safety, sustaining the biodiversity or maintaining the habitat. This Foreshore Assent Document is a control and permission document for permitted works to the physical aspect of the Foreshore.

This assent covers the period 25th May 2022 – 25th May 2027.

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.

Please contact the Wessex Area Support Team mailbox (wessexareateam@naturalengland.org.uk) to notify us of any changes to your planned operations.

Yours sincerely
Wessex Area Support Team

a) **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.