

WEST BAY COASTAL IMPROVEMENTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is West Bay not already protected adequately against flooding?

A: West Bay is protected but not to modern standards. There are parts of the current flood defence system that will become increasingly vulnerable owing to rising sea levels and increased numbers of storms. East Beach is a dynamic feature and does not have the resilience that modern standards require.

Q: What will happen if we do nothing now to address the effects of coastal changes on the existing flood defences?

A: At West Beach we will see an increasing frequency and quantity of overtopping of the existing defences as storms occur more frequently. As in 2014, waves overtop the seawall and flood the road and properties behind. Flood waters eventually return to the Harbour along drainage pathways, but this happens too late to avoid damage to properties and infrastructure such as roads.

At East Beach we may see increasing numbers of storm events each year where the beach is in danger of being significantly lost and damaged, with possible breach meaning loss of effectiveness as a flood defence and risk to properties. As in 2016, 2014 and many previous years, the Environment Agency have to attend after each storm event to re-profile the beach and the frequency of this is increasing. It is not certain that sufficient shingle will always be available to rebuild the beach after damage occurs. There is a finite quantity of shingle to do this, and in 2010 the Environment Agency carried out a major exercise to transport shingle from Freshwater Beach to supplement East Beach. This practice is not sustainable. It requires statutory approval and it has been indicated that this will not be given in the future. Therefore an alternative solution must be found. Any solution must align with agreed strategies in the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) and the World Heritage Site designation allowing natural processes to occur.

Q: What could you do to improve the defences at West Bay?

A: The joint project team (the Environment Agency (EA) and West Dorset District Council (WDDC)) is currently looking at the different coastal defence options. They will be presented to the public and other stakeholders in a series of consultations over the next year or so. We will advise you of the options which are both feasible and affordable, seek your views, follow up on your comments and develop a short list of options for further consultation. Through this process we will together arrive at a preferred solution.

Q: What are the options likely to be at West Beach?

A: In principle the options appear to comprise a) some form of new or extended rock protection structures at the beach, and/or b) installation of improved drainage pathways around the promenade, so that any water that does overtop the defences is transported rapidly and safely back to the sea.

Q: What are the options likely to be at East Beach?

A: In principle the options appear to be a) reinforcing the existing beach, perhaps by installing a stable 'core' of, for example, bags filled with shingle, large rocks, or sheet piles with improvements in drainage paths behind the shingle beach; or b) to construct a set-back solid flood defence along a line between the harbour and the eastern cliffs. A combination of these options may be appropriate.

Q: When will the improved flood defences be completed?

A: EA/WDDC will work with engineering consultants CH2M over 2016/17 to establish the feasible options. During this time we will be consulting with the public and organisations to establish the preferred option and we hope to complete that stage in mid-2017. Tenders for the detailed design and construction of the works would then be sought and a contract awarded in late 2017. Detailed designs would be produced and planning approvals obtained in 2018 ready to start construction soon after, with completion expected in 2019, subject to weather conditions and seasonal constraints, e.g. main tourist season at West Bay.

Q: What will happen if we experience a major storm before the new defences are completed?

A: The EA and WDDC are always prepared through our emergency procedures to deal with the flood risks arising from extreme storm events. In addition the EA has been working on detailed contingency plans to further reduce flood risks in such events – these plans include utilising tonnes of surplus shingle, stored at the back of East Beach, to rebuild the beach ridge should this prove necessary, and installing temporary flood barriers at key locations in the town to help contain overspill waters and direct them safely back to the sea by gravity or pumping.

Q: Who else are you consulting with?

A: On projects such as this we consult with all the interested parties we can identify – local residents, land owners & businesses, trade organisations, elected Members and officers at West Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council, Bridport Local Area Partnership, Bridport Town Council, Burton Bradstock Parish Council, Symondsburry Parish Council, Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, Dorset Coast Forum, Natural England, Historic England, National Trust, RSPB, Dorset Wildlife Trust; also relevant utilities companies – Wessex Water, National Grid, Western Power Distribution, British Telecom and other piped/cabled local service providers.

Q: Will you consider reefs or groynes?

A: Our consultants will consider all the technical options which could potentially provide a feasible and acceptable environmental solution. If a technical option is not likely to provide the desired flood defence outcome or be environmentally unacceptable, then it will be excluded from the short list of options, giving sound reasons. The likely costs of each option will also be considered, and ultimately the agreed preferred solution(s) must be economically justifiable and affordable within available budgets.

Q: In constructing these major works, how will you avoid damaging the town's businesses with disruption during the tourist and holiday season?

A: We will work with all parties likely to be affected by the construction works, to identify particularly sensitive areas and timings where/when the nature and duration of construction activity must be constrained. We expect this will be particularly during (but not limited to) the peak holiday season of mid-July through August.

Q: Our World Heritage Site designation is very important to us. How will you avoid causing damage detrimental to this designation?

A: Our team includes environmental specialists, landscape archaeologists and ecologists. They will work with the Jurassic Coast team throughout the options development process to ensure that the agreed solutions help maximise the benefits of the Jurassic Coast and avoid undermining its important geological status.

Q: Will we have to endure such construction works again in a few years time, when rising sea level and climate change increase flood risks still further?

A: The project is planning for 50 to 100 years, so hopefully there will be less disruption over the years. At East Beach the plan is to hold the line and increase resilience for the next 50 years, and to facilitate sustainable beach realignment in the subsequent 50 to 100 years period. We plan to put in place measures that will satisfy all these needs. Maintenance of the defences will of course need to be carried out from time to time.

Q: How much will all this cost and who will pay?

A: Cost estimates will be prepared for each of the short listed options as they become sufficiently developed. It is likely that a significant proportion of the cost will be funded by the government under DEFRA's Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA). Partnership funding will be sought from Local Levy, which is provided by lead local flood authorities, and directly from West Dorset District Council.