



Future Coast Charmouth

Mid Programme Project Update

 Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Coastal transition accelerator programme

Part of the £200m
Flood and coastal innovation programmes

Dorset
Coast Forum



Jacobs

Purpose

This document summarises the progress achieved in the first year of the Future Coast Charmouth project, which has been running since March 2025, and serves as a mid-programme update ahead of project completion in March 2027.

Alongside [Future Coast North Swanage](#), the project forms part of the broader Future Coast Dorset Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme (CTAP).

This update also summarises how each option from the approved [Outline Business Case \(OBC\)](#) is progressing, using a traffic light framework to present status clearly and consistently.

OBC Context

The OBC provides the early, structured justification for the project and sets the agreed scope of works.

The project is centred on long-term planning for future generations and supporting coastal communities to understand, respond to and adapt to ongoing coastal change. Although funding has been allocated and may support tangible interventions – such as improved beach access, drainage schemes or strategic land acquisition – the emphasis of this project is on planning for the future of the coastline. Recognising that coastal change is inevitable, the project focuses on building community resilience through knowledge sharing and the development of practical, sustainable adaptation options.

Programme

Options have been prioritised for delivery based on extensive community engagement undertaken before the OBC in 2024, and throughout the project so far (post-OBC). This engagement has played a central role in shaping which elements of the programme move forward first.

[Engagement Summary report pre-OBC \(Round 1\)](#)

[Engagement Summary report post-OBC \(Round 2\)](#)

These options were developed in collaborative workshops with the CTAP Steering Group, comprising Dorset Council, Dorset Coast Forum, the Environment Agency and consultants Jacobs, as well as with stakeholder engagement events with the local Charmouth community in 2024.

Delivery Options

Because of the technical and regulatory nature of the work, some delivery options have progressed more slowly and others have been discounted. Feasibility factors—including environmental policy, legal requirements and funding constraints—alongside feedback from stakeholder Steering and Working groups, have helped refine the programme and identify options that lack community support or do not reflect local priorities.

The programme has been deliberately balanced to focus on the most valued and widely supported actions from the 2024–2025 community engagement, and has been refined iteratively to ensure effective use of the funding while meeting grant requirements.

Traffic light system framework

In this update each option is coloured green, amber or red:

- **Green:** This high-priority option is progressing well and is planned for delivery, based on what we know at this stage.
- **Amber:** This option is being kept under review as it may not be possible to deliver or further work is required to understand whether delivery would be appropriate.
- **Red:** This option has been fully considered and is not being taken forward.

In Engagement Round 2 in the Summer of 2025, the Charmouth community were asked to provide their preference on 10 of the delivery options that were Amber at that time. This has helped the project team develop which options to prioritise.



Options overview

Option Number	Option Name	Option Theme	Completion Status
1	Beach, river, cliff monitoring and behaviours assessment	Adaptation	Complete
2	Planning and building control mapping and guidance	Adaptation	In progress
3	Adaptation Plan	Adaptation	In progress
4	Flood and cliff retreat warning system, emergency response plan and an awareness campaign	Adaptation	Cancelled
5	Access improvements: West Beach	Access	In progress
6	River flooding	Nature based solutions	Cancelled
7	Vegetated slopes	Nature based solutions	In progress
8	Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC) and car park roll back and pop-up	Rollback	In progress

Option Number	Option Name	Option Theme	Completion status
9	Defence adaptation study	Resilience	In progress
10	Surface and groundwater management	Resilience	Cancelled
11	Improve CHCC flood and erosion resilience	Resilience	In progress
12	Assess the risk to the sewage pumping station	Resilience	Complete
13	National Coast Science Wardens	Community	In progress
14	Environmental and heritage reports	Adaptation	Cancelled
15	Stakeholder Steering Group (e.g. coastal change or cliff management committee)	Community	Complete
16	Examination of alternative tourism revenues	Adaptation	Cancelled
17	Riverside path	Access	Cancelled

Beach, river, cliff monitoring and behaviour assessments

Beach, river, cliff monitoring and behaviour assessments

Status Summer 2025

This report provides an in-depth geomorphological assessment and examination of coastal processes, producing a scientific evidence base to inform which adaptation options are most appropriate and where they should be implemented, based on the geomorphology. This report and study was produced by the project consultants, Jacobs, and was foundational to supporting the refinement of adaptation options throughout Phase 1. These technical reports are publicly available, online and in the Charmouth Community Library, and can be used by communities to help guide adaptation projects.

For more information see the [Technical reports](#) on the project webpage.



Beach, river, cliff monitoring and behaviour assessments -

COMPLETE

Status April 2026

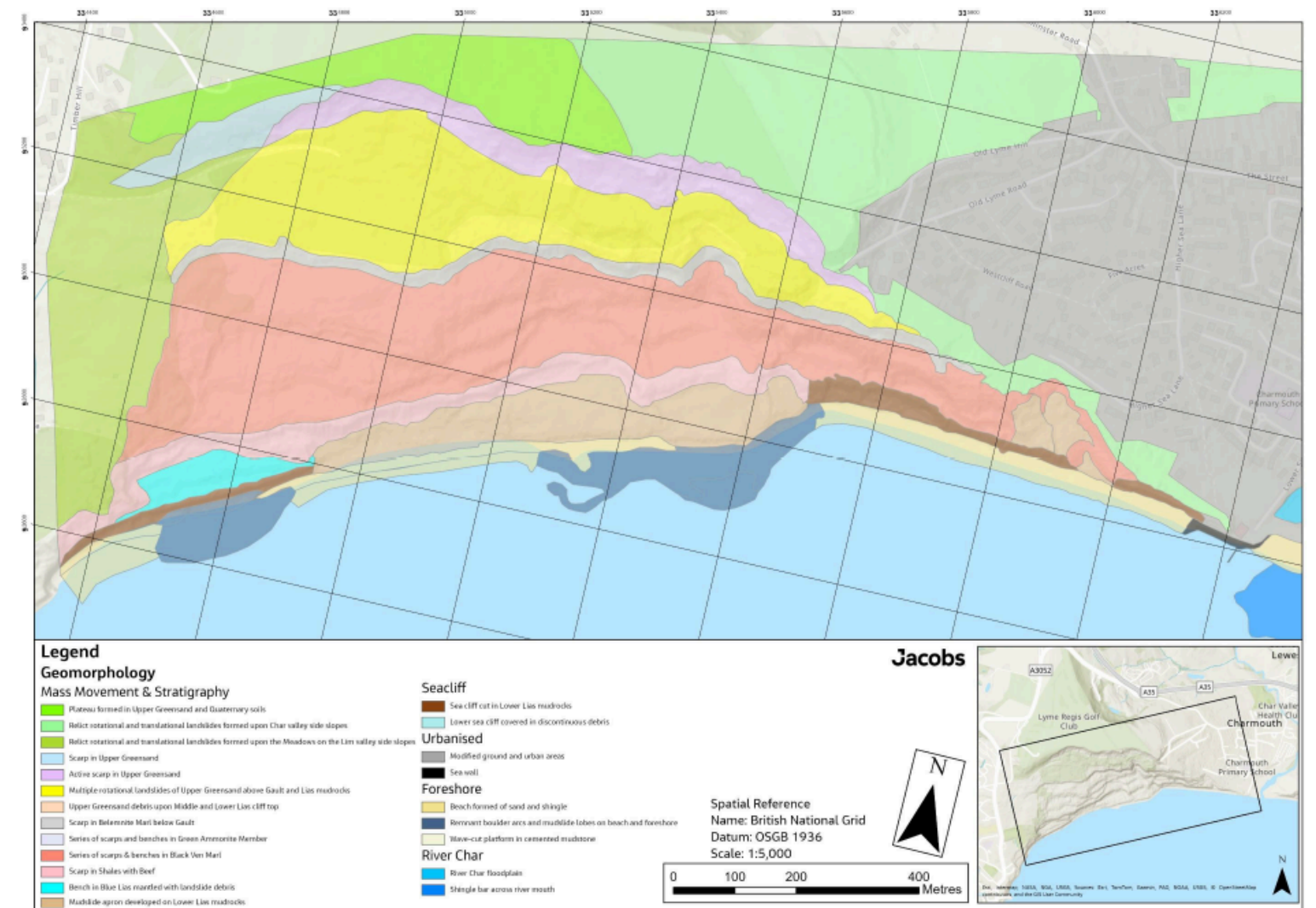


Figure 3-1. Geomorphological interpretation of the site boundary West of the River Char including Black Ven and The Spittles.

Planning and building control mapping and guidance

Planning and building control
mapping and guidance

Status Summer 2025



Planning and building control
mapping and guidance

Status April 2026

This work is largely complete and uses evidence from the baseline assessment and other studies to identify where development should or shouldn't be allowed, based on risks from coastal erosion and land instability. Led by Jacobs and supported by the Dorset Council Planning Team, the findings will help shape updated planning policy and guidance.

These recommendations may influence future Coastal Change Management Areas (CCMAs), areas identified as likely to be affected by physical change to the shoreline through erosion.

Thus, they could be incorporated into the [Dorset Local Plan](#). This would help limit new development in vulnerable coastal areas while guiding appropriate development in places at risk.



Adaptation Plan

Adaptation plan

Status Summer 2025



Adaptation plan

Status April 2026

This key part of the project will outline how the community can prepare for future coastal change after the project ends in March 2027. In February, we held engagement events and opened an online feedback form to gather views on issues such as deteriorating sea defences, sea-level rise, increased flooding and the implications of taking no action.

The Adaptation Plan will bring these themes together and set out 'adaptive pathways'—flexible routes showing how and when the community might respond as conditions change. These pathways will support long-term decision-making and help residents plan ahead. A further round of consultation will take place once the plans are developed in more detail.



Adaptation Plan (continued)

The Adaptation Plan is intended as a long-term, living document to guide decisions on coastal change well beyond the life of this project, supported by the current [Shoreline Management Plan \(SMP\)](#). It could be formally adopted through an updated Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan, helping keep it locally relevant, strengthening planning status and future funding bids, and ensuring continued community ownership.

If adopted in this way, responsibility for updating and reviewing the Adaptation Plan would sit with the local council or Neighbourhood Plan group, with support from Dorset Council as the Local Planning Authority.

In summary, while the project creates the Adaptation Plan, its long-term management is best secured through community-led planning processes, ensuring it remains active, relevant and able to guide future adaptation.

Charmouth Parish Neighbourhood Plan

2021 – 2035



November 2021 Final Version

Prepared by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on
behalf of Charmouth Parish Council

[Link to Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Flood and cliff retreat warning system, emergency response plan and an awareness campaign

Flood and cliff retreat warning system, emergency response plan and an awareness campaign



Flood and cliff retreat warning system, emergency response plan and an awareness campaign

Status Summer 2025

Status April 2026

The project team have decided not to pursue this element for Charmouth based on its low popularity throughout the engagement process and based on advice and comments provided by key stakeholders, including community representatives.



Access improvements: West Beach

Access improvements:
West Beach

Status Summer 2025

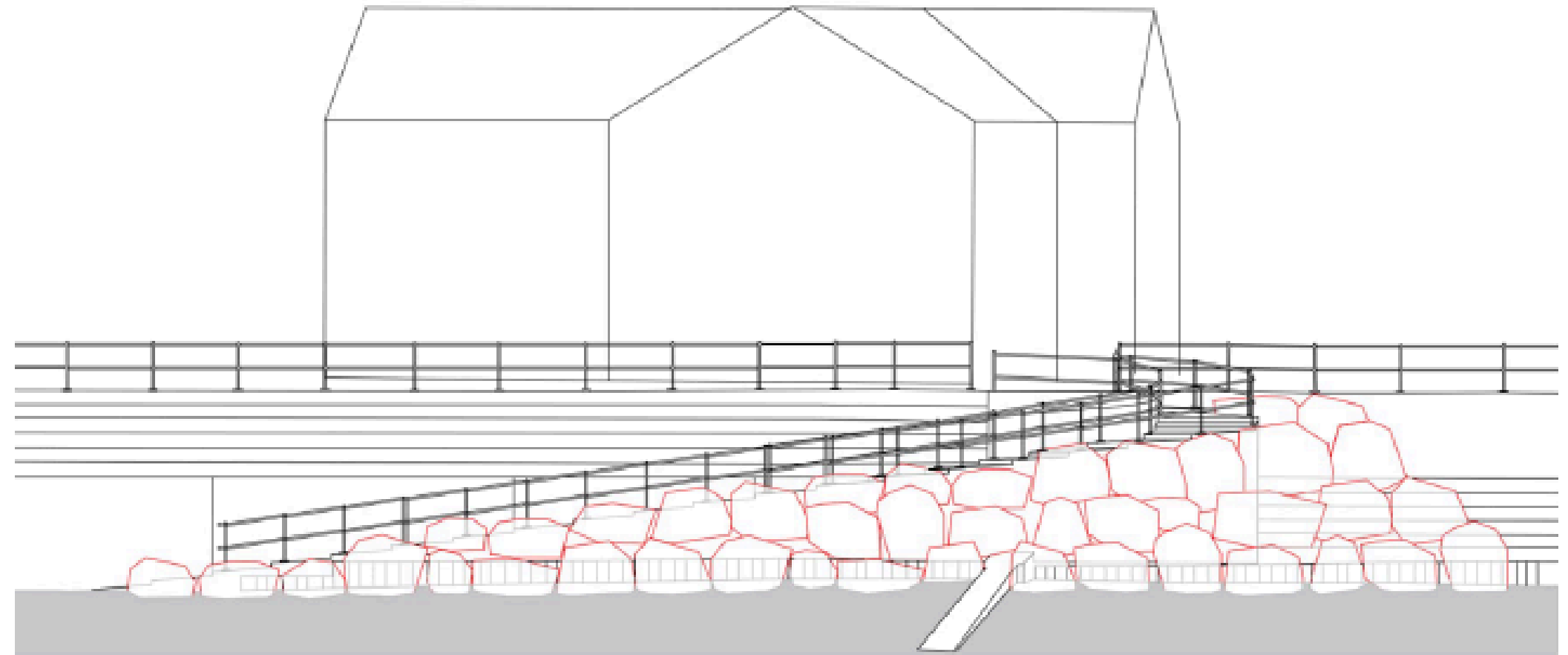


Access improvements:
West Beach

Status April 2026

This is a high-priority project for the community, and significant progress has been made. Dorset Council asked Jacobs to review the 2017 beach access design (which still has planning permission) to assess its deliverability. At the same time, a specialist marine contractor produced detailed cost estimates, and pre-application advice from the Marine Management Organisation confirmed that a full marine licence, an Environmental Impact Assessment and several additional studies would be required.

When all costs were combined, the total estimate exceeded £2 million, with an expected delivery time of around 19 months. Given that the total CTAP budget for both Charmouth and North Swanage is £3 million—and that both communities have other high-priority needs—the 2017 design was judged financially and practically unviable.

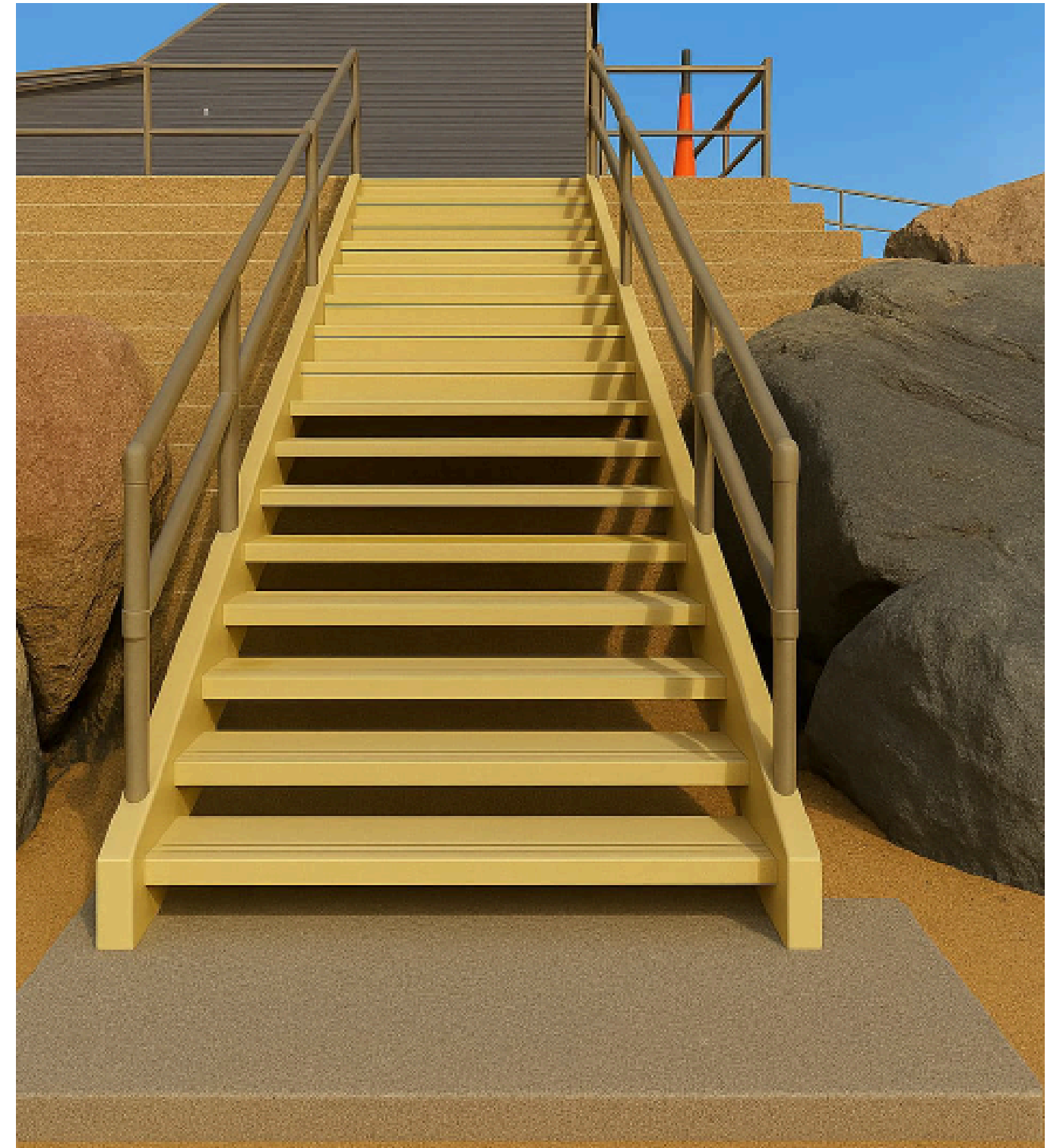


Access improvements: West Beach (continued)

In response to the constraints of the previous design, a new proposal is being developed to replace the existing beach access with a durable, appropriately sized structure that improves accessibility for all users, including those with reduced mobility. Dorset Council has appointed an engineering consultancy to design a solution that meets environmental licensing requirements and can be delivered within the remaining project timeframe.

Once the design is complete, it will need support from Charmouth Parish Council before being submitted for planning permission and marine licensing. Because this proposal replaces the current steps with a similar but smaller-scale structure, it is considered both deliverable and a practical alternative to the 2017 scheme.

Please note, the graphic provided is purely for illustration purposes and does not represent the final design.



For more information see the [Technical reports](#) on the project webpage.

River flooding (Nature Based Solutions)

River flooding/Nature based solutions

Status Summer 2025



River flooding/Nature based solutions

Status April 2026

Although this option scored highly in community feedback, the project team identified that the proposal had been misunderstood. Many believed it involved delivering a natural flood management (NFM) scheme, when it was only intended to fund a study into whether reopening natural flood zones could help reduce flash-flood risk. The team explored the possibility of a separate NFM project, including early discussions with landowners, but this did not progress due to lack of landowner buy-in.

Future NFM work may be possible if land becomes available to purchase along the River Char. Following further discussions with the community and stakeholders, the decision was made not to take this option forward, as it is not currently viable.



Vegetated Slopes (Nature Based Solutions)

Vegetated slopes/Nature based solutions

Status Summer 2025



Vegetated slopes/Nature based solutions

Status April 2026

Community feedback confirmed this is not a high-priority action. Due to the area's Site of Special Scientific Interest status (SSSI) and other associated environmental constraints, vegetation planting for slope stabilisation is not currently being prioritised due to licensing concerns. Natural England has advised that only a very limited range of species would be permitted, and research indicates these mainly grass-based species may not provide meaningful stabilisation, making the approach uncertain and potentially ineffective.

The project team is exploring the idea in North Swanage, where it is a higher priority. If discussions with Natural England identify permissible species with stronger root systems in North Swanage, the option could be reconsidered for Charmouth. For now, it remains a lower-priority action and may be reviewed following further engagement with Natural England.

For more information see the [Technical reports](#) on the project webpage.

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC) and car park rollback

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC) and car park rollback

Status Summer 2025



Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC) and car park rollback

Status April 2026

Relocating (rolling back) the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC) is a key CTAP action and one of the highest community priorities. Work has focused on identifying viable land or property that could safeguard a future CHCC site and support long-term adaptation in line with the [SMP](#) policy from 2025 onwards.

Over the past year, Dorset Council has carried out extensive work across Legal Services, Estates, Asset Strategy and Planning to progress land and property acquisition. This has included:

- reviewing title information and site constraints
- initiating valuations and early landowner engagement
- assessing restrictive covenants affecting preferred sites
- identifying legal and planning considerations
- engaging with the community and project groups to refine the shortlist.

This activity has helped narrow the focus onto the most realistic pathways for securing land within the CTAP delivery window, ensuring options align with long-term adaptation needs.

CHCC and car park rollback (continued)

A number of constraints continue to influence delivery:

- Restrictive covenants affecting land in the centre of the village, requiring further legal review and potentially complex engagement with multiple beneficiaries.
- Open-market conditions, where Local Authorities must follow regulated processes that can limit competitiveness when opportunities arise.
- Fixed funding deadline (March 2027), requiring all acquisition activity – including any compensation linked to potential covenant discharge – to be completed within a non-extendable timeframe.

Dorset Council is continuing to explore several possible routes to secure a viable location for long-term rollback, including:

- Reviewing both land and property options within and outside the historic covenant boundary.
- Assessing legal routes to address the covenant, including feasibility and indicative timeframes.
- Continuing appropriate engagement with interested parties while respecting commercial sensitivities and confidentiality.



For more information on existing land covenants, please see this [article](#)

CHCC and car park rollback (continued)

To maintain momentum and ensure progress within the CTAP funding window, Dorset Council is:

- Finalising the appraisal of remaining viable acquisition pathways.
- Continuing legal work to fully understand covenant implications and potential solutions.
- Coordinating work across Estates, Asset Strategy and Legal to support delivery.
- Monitoring local market activity and preparing enabling actions so the Council can act promptly when required.

Despite the challenging context - narrow land availability, complex legal constraints and a fixed funding deadline - meaningful progress has been made in refining viable rollback pathways for Charmouth. Dorset Council continues to work proactively, collaboratively and within the boundaries of commercial sensitivity to secure a deliverable route that supports long-term community resilience. One of the key dependencies is asset ownership, which will ultimately need to be agreed with Charmouth Parish Council.



Defence adaptation study

Defence adaptation survey

Status Summer 2025



Defence adaptation survey

Status April 2026

A key community-supported priority is a defence adaptation study, developed through extensive engagement and discussions with the project Steering Groups. This study will set out a protocol to guide Dorset Council and the Parish Council in managing the deterioration and eventual removal of redundant risk-management assets. It will inform community transition planning and provide a long-term strategic process for decommissioning defence structures, including assessing the remaining life of these defences.

The work will also clarify legal responsibilities, such as identifying asset owners and obligations during failure or emergency scenarios, and include a cost-benefit assessment of decommissioning options. The scope has been prepared and commissioning is underway.



Surface and groundwater management

Surface and groundwater
management

Status Summer 2025



Surface and groundwater
management

Status April 2026

In Phase 1, Jacobs completed a high-level review of cliff drainage, assessing groundwater and surface water interactions with local geology, how this contributes to cliff instability and the feasibility of potential drainage solutions. The work also identified the investigations, monitoring, ecological considerations and planning constraints required to support any future proposals. The review highlights that groundwater pressure is a major driver of landslides, while effective drainage is highly site-specific. Jacobs concluded that improving urban drainage to prevent artificial groundwater loading should be the first priority, with targeted cliff drainage only pursued where evidence shows clear benefits.

This research is now publicly available and can be used to inform drainage proposals in the Charmouth area. Unfortunately, given the lead time required to develop the proposals into tangible cliff drainage projects, and the uncertainties around which interventions are permissible within the SSSI, it will no longer be feasible to deliver cliff drainage within the project timeframe.

For more information see the [Technical reports](#) on the project webpage.

Improve Old Cement Factory building flood and erosion resilience

Improve Old Cement
Factory building flood and
erosion resilience

Status Summer 2025



Improve Old Cement
Factory building flood and
erosion resilience

Status April 2026

Jacobs have assessed the property flood resilience (PFR) of the Old Cement Factory Building, carrying out on-site checks and speaking with tenants about past and current flooding issues. The review is now complete and Charmouth Parish Council have agreed on specific PFR measures to be delivered. These include practical measures such as installing flood doors.

For more information see the [Technical reports](#) on the project webpage.

Photo credit: Bill Burn



Assess the risk to the sewage pumping station

Assess the risk to the
sewage pumping station

Status Summer 2025



Assess the risk to the
sewage pumping station
- **COMPLETE**

Status April 2026

Throughout Phase 1, Dorset Council and the Dorset Coast Forum engaged with Wessex Water regarding the Charmouth sewage pumping station. Wessex Water confirmed that no works are planned, as their assessment shows the asset is at minimal risk. As the station is their responsibility, it was agreed that commissioning a separate project-led review would be inappropriate.



National Coast Science Wardens / CoastSnap Project

National Coast Science
Wardens



National Coast Science Wardens /
CoastSnap Project

Status Summer 2025

Status April 2026

The proposed 'Coast Science Wardens' group was discounted after discussions with key stakeholders, including the CHCC, who agreed it would duplicate existing volunteer efforts at Charmouth and should not be a project priority.

A citizen science element of this delivery option has been delivered through the installation of '[CoastSnap](#)', a fixed-point photography cradle now actively used by the community to monitor beach change. Dorset Council is working with the University of Plymouth on a Masters Research (MRes) project analysing CoastSnap images alongside other datasets, including project-commissioned LiDAR data. The research will be completed in Autumn 2026.



For more information see the [Technical reports](#) on the project webpage.

Environmental and heritage reports

Environmental and heritage reports



Environmental and heritage reports

Status Summer 2025

Status April 2026

Given the feedback from the community engagement and key stakeholders, the project team are not pursuing with this option for Charmouth. The feedback was clear that the project should minimise the development of research and reports and focus on providing tangible outcomes for the community. This option is no longer being pursued.



Stakeholder Steering Group (e.g. coastal change or cliff management committee)

Stakeholder Steering Group
(e.g. coastal change or cliff management committee)

Status Summer 2025



Stakeholder Steering Group
(e.g. coastal change or cliff management committee)
- COMPLETE

Status April 2026

This aspect of the project has been delivered. The Future Coast Charmouth Steering Group convene every 8 weeks to discuss project progress and review outcomes.



Examination of alternative tourism revenues

Examination of
alternative tourism
revenues

Status Summer 2025



Examination of
alternative tourism
revenues

Status April 2026

Given the feedback from the community engagement and key stakeholders, the project team are not pursuing with this option for Charmouth. The feedback was clear that the project should minimise the development of research and reports and focus on providing tangible outcomes for the community. This option is no longer being pursued.



Photo credit: Bill Burn

Riverside path

Riverside path

Status Summer 2025



Riverside path

Status April 2026

Dorset Council engaged with the landowner of the historic riverside path with a suggested proposal to reopen the path, using a new footpath route, but this proposal was rejected and could not be taken forward.





For more project information, please visit the project webpage at:
<https://www.dorsetcoasthaveyoursay.co.uk/futurecoast-charmouth>



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