

Minutes of the Meeting of the Slapton Line Partnership Steering Group Follaton House, on 2nd March 2016

Present :

Julian Brazil (Devon CC Cllr for Kingsbridge & Stokenham & South Hams DC Cllr for Stokenham)
Peter Brunt and Adam Keay (Neighbourhood Highway Team Devon CC)
Lesley Crocker (Communications, South Hams DC)
Martin Davies (Environment Agency)
Alan Denbigh (Slapton Line Partnership)
Dan Field, (Engineer, South Hams District Council)
Kate Gill (Vice Chair, Strete PC)
Cllr Richard Foss (SHDC Cllr for Allington and Strete)
Jon Grimes (Natural England)
Val Mercer (Slapton PC)
Andy Pratt (Slapton Ley Field Centre Manager, Field Studies Council)
Piers Spence (Stokenham PC)
Robin Toogood (South Devon AONB), Chair

Apologies: Peter Chamberlain (DCC Environment Mgr), Chris Brook (SHDC Engineering Mgr)

The chairman welcomed the three parish council representatives who had been invited to attend this particular meeting because of the recent storm damage at Torcross and the need to ensure good communications.

1. Minutes and actions arising from meeting 18th November 2015

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and actions were agreed to be addressed as part of the following points:

2. Update on current situation

Robin Toogood began the meeting by thanking all those involved in the recent storm response, whose hard work had enabled the road to open so quickly and also for responding to community concerns about the Torcross sea wall.

a. Repair and protection works adjacent to the road

The diversion through the car park was now in place allowing the road to be re-opened with traffic light control. The damaged section of the wall had been removed and new sheet-piling was in the process of being installed. The cost of the work estimated at £180k is split 3-ways between Devon County Council, South Hams District and the Environment Agency. The plan is to have the road works completed by Easter assuming no further storm damage.

Some lessons had been learned with the diversion signage which had been designed around a road breach between Slapton and Strete rather than at Torcross. Also the fold-down signs (placed at strategic area 'entry' points for over 10 years) had rusted so have been replaced by A-frame signs. Two

sets of signs are now available for the two different eventualities and the local signage is in the process of being re-designed. It was agreed that awareness of these local routes (signed with circles and diamonds) needs to be raised again particularly bearing in mind the congestion that has occurred during the road closure.

Cllr Brazil added that he had several emails to pass on thanking those responsible for their speedy response to the storm damage.

Action: Devon County Council Highways to pass details of the new local routes to Parish Councils and also for the Slapton Line Partnership website so that the route information can be updated.

b. Sea Wall at Torcross

Investigations into the sea wall structure by the Environment Agency had established that it was structurally sound though there has been some movement (as evidenced by the cracks in the walkway). The investigations aren't yet complete but the expectation is that there will be additional works to repair and protect the defences. Works could include additional rock armour or piles. These are regarded as 'Emergency Works' and as such will be fully funded by the Environment Agency and progressed as a priority.

3. Longer Term Planning

a. Economic Assessment Report

The economic assessment for the value of the road has now been completed. This was undertaken in order to derive a value which could be used in support of potential funding requests. The annual value of tourism that the road contributes to the area is estimated at £9.28 million. This translates to £4.11 million 'Gross Value Added'. The calculation adds a further £435k representing the costs to residents and businesses caused by a diversion per annum (which the meeting agreed does not include inconvenience and additional charges to business owners such as farmers).

Action: Alan Denbigh to liaise with Julian Brazil over his suggestion that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) should be approached as a potential source of financial support.

b. Update on road vulnerability report

A road vulnerability assessment had been undertaken by the SHDC engineers which includes, examining the rate of beach erosion at different points along Slapton Line, the width of the beach-head buffer on the seaward side of the road, and the availability of space to move the road further back from the sea. The report concludes that the most vulnerable sections appear to be located within the first 700 m and final 300 m of the study area running northwards from Torcross to the middle car park. The main drive to produce the study was to facilitate advance planning including by prioritising where advance ecological studies should take place. The report is now with the Devon County Council environment team to proceed with. The report can also be fed into the Beach Management Plan (see later sections).

Robin Toogood as chair thanked Dan Field for his hard work in completing the plan.

An extended discussion took place around the significance of the SSSI designation in determining the management options that were chosen for managing the line.

The management options were based on recommendations in a report commissioned by the Partnership which was produced by consulting engineers Scott Wilson (see Slapton Line Partnership website¹ section - see section 15 Option Appraisal - which considered cost/benefit analysis for eight options²).

A rapid response to environmental impact queries from Natural England had been an essential part of the recent works that had taken place. Piers Spence invited Jon Grimes from Natural England to meet Stokenham Parish Council at its forthcoming annual meeting.

c. Beach Management Plan (BMP)

A Beach Management Plan is a key document which can be used to decide detailed management policies and is also necessary for unlocking any further government flood defence funding. Though the Environment Agency has a BMP planned for Slapton, it is not within its 5 year plan and hence would not take place before 2021.

The meeting agreed that the production of the Beach Management Plan should be brought forward and progressed as rapidly as possible, and it is hoped that South Ham District Council will be in a position to take the lead on commissioning the Plan. This would be subject to securing the funding to pay for the plan, and subject to the Environment Agency providing assistance with the project brief and specification. It was suggested that accelerating the production of the BMP could help to open out discussion about the management options to public scrutiny and influence, and allow updated information to be fed in about recent changes to the beach through storm impacts. Previous research such as the Scott Wilson report and the recent vulnerability report would also form useful inputs.

The report in itself is not a solution as further action, based on the report, would be required, but it would resolve much of the recent discussion and uncertainty around next steps for preserving the line as long as possible and enabling effort to be focussed on vulnerable stretches. Once having completed this report, the solutions and costings proposed could then be used to seek funding support for implementation of the works.

It was suggested that a timescale of approx. 12 months to produce the Beach Management Plan is likely and would involve public consultations and interim presentations.

An estimate of around £50,000 had been suggested for producing the BMP and this could be achieved by a 3-way split between SHDC, DCC and EA and formal confirmation of this will be sought from the

¹ http://www.slaptonline.org/download.php?id=88&type=DOWNLOAD_FILE

² **1:** No Active Intervention **2:** Beach Nourishment; **3:** Beach Recycling; **4:** Rock Revetment **5:** Sheet Pile; **6:** Realign the existing road **7:** Upgraded Route along existing road network landward of Slapton Ley; **8:** New Road landward of Slapton Ley)

respective organisations. An alternative funding avenue will also be investigated, which would be to seek a “local levy” from the regional flood defence committee.

One suggestion was that the scope of the BMP could be extended to include Beesands and Hallsands, though this would need further consideration.

Actions : Robin Toogood and Martin Davies to liaise over an approach to the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee for funding to accelerate the production of the BMP. . SHDC, DCC and EA to consider and confirm willingness to jointly fund the production of the Plan. SHDC to confirm its willingness to lead on the commissioning of the Plan.

d. Communications

Currently joint statements and updates (including from the Environment Agency) are being placed on the SLP website. Lesley Crocker agreed to consult the Natural England press officer, in addition to Devon County and Environment Agency officers, when agreeing future common messages. With the often rapidly changing situation, social media had been useful in rapidly communicating messages on road closures and diversions etc.

Action: It was agreed that the launch of the Beach Management Plan would be a useful point around which to provide a communications newsletter followed by public consultations in an open public venue such as Stokenham Village Hall.

The date of the next meeting was left open in order with an agreement to call it as necessary and use it as a useful decision point.