



# Slapton Line partnership living with a changing coast

## Slapton Line Adaptation and access along the coast path

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The coast path that runs along the shingle barrier from Torcross to Strete Gate, South Devon, is a uniquely beautiful route. It is flanked by Start Bay on one side and Slapton Ley, the Southwest's largest freshwater lake, on the other and hosts a stunning variety of internationally important and protected wildlife. It is a rare 4km stretch of flat path on an otherwise bumpy Devon coastline, and so is tremendously important for enabling access for all, helping to ensure the health and well-being of locals and visitors, successful enterprise, and community prosperity.

Alongside this coast path runs Slapton Line, a coastal section of the A379 road that represents the quickest route between Torcross, Slapton and Strete Gate villages. Like many coastal areas, the shingle barrier and road are exposed to periodic storm events and erosion, with both intensity and frequency being accelerated by the climate crisis.

In 2019, the Slapton Line Partnership published a 'Strategy for Adaptation', acknowledging that despite over two decades of collaborative work, Slapton Line will soon reach the end of its life, with no viable options for long-term maintenance or relocation.

The Slapton Line Partnership exists to

1. Plan and deliver the Adaptation Project in anticipation of future change, including a range of activities to manage impacts and build on opportunities
2. Ensure that appropriate contingency and emergency response plans and preparations are maintained for responding to future storm and erosion events

Through the Adaptation Project, a number of responsible authorities and partners<sup>1</sup> are working to proactively manage and ensure the future for this important stretch of coast path.

Despite the challenges in predicting future storm and erosion impacts to Slapton Line, in all likely forecast scenarios where the road is lost, it has been concluded that there is no risk of permanent loss of access to the coast path over the next 10 years.

In rare circumstances, there may be temporary disruption at limited locations along the coast path, but with tide and non-tide dependent wading access maintained. It is not possible to predict when or where this may occur, or if at all. However, with similar access challenges at multiple locations on the Devon coastline, such as South Milton Sands, Man Sands and the Erme Estuary, the relevant teams have a wealth of on-the-ground experience and expertise for flexible and adaptive management, ensuring continuity of the coast path.

<sup>1</sup> Responsible authorities and partners include Devon County Council – Access Authority, Natural England – England Coast Path Regulator, South West Coast Path Association – SWCP management, Wild Planet Trust – Slapton Ley and barrier landowner, Field Studies Council – Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve land management, and South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – landscape management

Any permanent disruption of access along the coast path will result in alternative route planning inland using public rights of way, existing paths and lanes, and new path creation. However, given the incredibly low likelihood of permanent disruption of coast path access over the next 10-years, it is not viable or necessary to prepare alternative routes as part of priority adaptation planning.

Recognising the concern communities have over the future of the area, we are working to increase our knowledge and predictive ability to forecast and proactively manage this changing coast.

Although closure of Slapton Line will present many challenges, there are a tremendous range of benefits that arise by removing motorised vehicle access from this very special part of the Devon coastline. There will be no high-speed vehicle noise, air quality and pedestrian, cyclist and horse rider safety will significantly improve and the new found tranquillity will welcome home an abundance of wildlife making the experience of visitors to the coastline better than ever.