

## Dorset Coast Forum Conference Notes

Dorset Coast Forum is a Dorset Council body that brings together many organisations with interests on the coast. Its annual conference was held at Weymouth Pavilion on 24.10.24.

A number of stalls and displays were accessible throughout. There was a display on illustrated boards chronicling the Great Storm of 1824, which claimed over 100 lives along the Dorset coast 200 years ago. The sponsors, who specialise in harbour construction had stalls too. The presentations began with an overview of DCF achievements, which are many and valuable.

### Presentations

#### **1 What are the current challenges for Coastal Change in Dorset?**

##### **Dave Picksley, Senior Coastal Advisor, Environment Agency**

Central government policy is not to defend the effects of rising sea levels, increased rainfall and increased wave damage due to increasingly powerful storms. Except where useful assets and real estate values outweigh the cost of renovating or building new infrastructure. The coastline in Symondsburry parish, along with most of the rest of the Dorset coast, apart from harbours, does not qualify to have any money spent to defend it.

##### In detail

Major factors affecting erosion

I Meteorological

i) Long period swell waves. The prevailing direction of these is from west and southwest. They are becoming more frequent and more intense.

ii) Prolonged easterly winds. These have increased recently and last year blew for **30% of the time**. This alters longshore drift (and beach profiles) and attacks cliffs and harbours etc from an unexpected direction.

iii) Storm surge.

When atmospheric pressure is low, as it is during storms, the sea level isn't suppressed, so sea level rises. When this combines with high tides, high winds and big waves the effects are compounded.

II Sea Level

The rate of sea level rise is accelerating. In a hundred years time it will be up to your (imaginary) chests.

III Geology

Rainfall intensity last winter rose by 40% over recent averages. This extra water lubricates the mudstones and marls, which become unstable. Then harder layers slip and cause landslips.

## The SHORELINE MANAGEMENT PLAN

### Property

Along the Dorset 6,000 properties are currently at risk. With sea level rise that figure is multiplied by three. "There is NO funding for asset maintenance."

### Cliff Fall

Land instability risk increases with large rainfall events, wet winters (and summers). "There is NO government funding to address land instability. ([Note the erosion beneath the road at Eypes Mouth.](#))

### Storm impacts

Chesil Beach was breached in 1824, and on several occasions since. Repairs to the Cobb at Lyme Regis and the old harbour wall at West Bay are being delayed while Dorset Council tries to find the money. The delay exacerbates the problem. ([A stitch in time ... Not](#))

### Asset Management

Historical assets such as Victorian piers and WWII pill boxes often have no ownership records. Lack of funding and neglect can lead to catastrophic failure.

Natural heritage assets such as cliff tops have no coherent protection strategy. ([The aims of the Jurassic Coast Trust might be in conflict SSSI nature protection.](#))

### Managing Beaches

Some are artificial. Some are kept in place by groynes. Some are backed by cliffs, to which they afford some protection. Some are naturally replenished, by durable rocks. (Eype beach is backed by soft clays containing a few limestone nodules. These eventually erode. The gravel and pebbles are mainly of chert and flint which probably arrived on hilltop surfaces in small quantities at the end of the Ice Age. ([It's my guess that Eype beach is being slowly depleted by a long shore drift taking the gravel eastward. Perhaps those with greater local knowledge will disagree.](#)) Dorset Council replenishes West Bay west beach by dredging pebbles every winter.

Under the heading ENVIRONMENT, the old style coastal protection measures such as concrete sea walls were criticised for causing 'coastal squeeze'. When new harbours and esplanades are built their concrete surfaces should encourage seaweed to grow and should show 10% or more 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (BNG).

The session came to an end with mention of the Southern Coastal Group, SCOPAC. Not sure how that helps.

## **SECOND SESSION**

The Second Session looked in more detail at the Coastal Management Plan. Alan Frampton spoke very rapidly and at times unclearly. He spoke of a HEDGEHOG IN THE HEADLIGHTS WITH EYES WIDE OPEN BUT NO WAY OF GETTING OUT OF THE WAY.

There is at present no statutory, integrated coastal zone plan and no active intervention plan. He gave the example of a caravan park that faces having its means of vehicular access eroding away. Yet there is no advanced plan for a new road. I think it unwise to go into more detail here.

It's not a question of IF, but of WHEN. There is a need for PROACTIVE rather than REACTIVE planning. Difficult choices mean they are put off, and postponed. Until it's too late. He lamented the lack of clear guidance about what was acceptable development in the coastal zone.

### **3. The Jurassic Coast Protected Site Strategy - content and engagement. Saskia Elliott, Protected Site Strategy Officer Jurassic Coast Trust**

This young woman is a Tik Tok influencer. She championed the role of new media in getting the message across. She spoke of a geo-heritage Sustainability Study and a Protected Site Strategy. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is an ISSI for geology. It aims not to intervene in the speed or nature of the erosion which allows for the internationally important Geology to be appreciated. **The Ammonite Pavement on Monmouth Beach is breaking up. This presents them with a dilemma.** Their jurisdiction stops at the top of the cliff. **At Black Ven the site boundary has moved 50 metres inland. This might become a problem with coastal landowners.**

### **4. Future Studland – a rapidly changing place.**

#### **Tracey Churcher, General Manager, National Trust Purbeck**

This presentation showed how a pro-active body such as the Purbeck NT engaged with local community groups in adapting to the loss by erosion of much-loved assets, by preserving their memory in the new assets that replaced them.

One interesting aspect relates to the loss of the NT car park. This opened the possibility of some form of 'mass transport'. This had the bonus of reducing the carbon footprint. Tracy Churcher was not the only speaker to want single-use barbecues to be banned. Mention of them always elicited a round of polite booing. She saw the role of the NT as bridging the gap between the public and statutory bodies.

### **5. Adapting to coastal change at Charmouth and North Swanage.**

#### **Ross Fitzgerald, Associate Director of Geomorphology, Jacobs**

This presentation focused on the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme, whereby £3million of central government money is to be allocated to projects in these two locations. There has been a democratic process, conducted by Dorset Coast Forum, to consult local communities. Those projects that will receive funding will be announced shortly.

### **6. South West Coast Path – Keeping an open path.**

#### **Julian Gray, Director, South West Coast Path Association**

The big news here is that South West Coast Path is going to become part of the National Coast Path. Its new status as a National Trail will give it extra protection and extra powers. The increased powers as part of the England Coast Path would help establish what Julian Gray called a Coastal Wildbelt. He didn't elaborate on

which other bodies were currently pursuing this. He noted that one third of the Dorset coast is owned by the National Trust.

**7. Keynote speaker: Chris Hines MBE, A Grain of Sand**

Chris Hines is one of the founders of Surfers Against Sewage. He gave a rousing call to get actively engaged in positive change, and to get better at communicating the need to act. He opened with a neologism: Sostalgia. It is something younger people have. It's a yearning for a future you know you should have – but will never get.

**8. Workshop: Communicating difficult conversations to a coastal community. Simon Wilson, Independent Facilitator, Wilson Sherriff**

This session started with a presentation about getting better at communicating, particularly when it's not good news. We then got into groups tasked with producing an effective message about the threat coastal communities face.

**8. The opportunities ahead – Coastal heritage at risk - challenges and opportunities. Antony Firth, Marine & Coastal Heritage, Historic England**

Much of this was about recording or rescuing historical assets before they were lost to the sea.

**9. Sustaining our beaches - a new approach.** Dr Matthew Wadey, Principal Coastal Scientist, South West Flood & Coastal. If you want an expert on beach replenishment Dr Matthew Wadey is the man to go to. I could watch his videos of sediment rich water all day, round Durlston Head. They're spending big money there but there's a lot of real estate to protect. It's all in the cost benefit analysis.

**10. Coasts in Mind - Empowering communities through putting their knowledge at the forefront of coastal planning.**

Caroline Barrie-Smith, Head of Audience Engagement, Museum of London Archaeology. Interesting.