

# North Devon & Somerset Shoreline Management Plan Review



## Our Changing Coastline

The coastline is undergoing constant change from the effects of waves, tidal currents and the changing climate. The amount of physical change depends upon the degree of exposure of each length of coast and the underlying geology. These changes usually take place over long historical periods. Examples include the ongoing movement of the pebble ridge at Westward Ho! and erosion of the cliffs between Blue Anchor and Watchet.

Another influence on the development of the coastline has been human intervention, particularly in attempts to stop the effect of erosion or flooding at particular locations. In many cases this has taken place with limited understanding of the consequences of carrying out these works on other locations up and down the coast.

Whilst these changes continue to take place, social, economic and environmental pressures are increasing in the coastal zone. People enjoy living by and visiting the coast and the pressure for more housing is ever present. Development often places stress on natural coastal habitats that are unique and of national and international importance.



Source: Photograph © www.bbc.co.uk

## Hartland Point to Anchor Head, including Lundy

This stretch of coastline has a rich diversity in its physical form, human usage and natural environment. This includes the wide extensive flood plain of the Somerset Levels, large urban areas such as Barnstaple and Bridgwater, the Hinkley Point Nuclear Power Station and many areas designated and protected for their heritage, landscape, geological and biological value. This combination of assets creates a coastline of great amenity value and a tourism economy of regional importance.

## What is a Shoreline Management Plan?

A Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) provides an objective, large-scale assessment of the risks to people and the developed, historic and natural environment, resulting from the evolution of the coast and estuaries up to their tidal limits. It provides a policy framework that addresses these risks, in a way that does not tie future generations to costly and unsustainable management. The plan aims to balance potentially conflicting interests along the coastline.

The SMP is a non-statutory policy document for the planning and management of coastal defences. It does not set policy for anything other than coastal defence management. It takes account of other existing planning initiatives and legislative requirements and is intended to inform wider strategic planning. As such, it does not set policies for the management of issues such as land drainage or renewable energy.



Source: Photograph © Ian Chidwick, 2008, www.oursouthwest.com

## Coastal Defence Planning

It is important to differentiate between the three tiers of coastal defence management in England and Wales:

- **SMP**  
*Identifies general policies and general implementation requirements.*
- **Coastal Defence Strategy**  
*Identifies nature and timing of works to be undertaken.*
- **Scheme**  
*Design and construction of defences and maintenance on a single frontage.*

## Sustainable Management

One of the main objectives in developing a Shoreline Management Plan is the identification of sustainable long term management policies for the coast. The Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) SMP guidance (2006) defines sustainable long term management policies as "those which take account of the relationships with other defences, developments and processes, and which avoid, as far as possible, committing future generations to inflexible and expensive options for defence".

Given sea level rise predictions, this would generally best be achieved through the creation of a naturally functioning coast; allowing it to move landwards or seawards at rates dictated by the natural processes of waves and tides. Along this SMP frontage, there are large areas of natural, undefended coastline and the policy selection in these areas has been driven by sustaining this situation.

Many areas along the North Devon and Somerset coastline have a long history of coastal defence intervention to reduce the risk of flooding and erosion. This means that the shoreline today is, in places, in an 'unnatural' form and position and would not necessarily revert to 'naturally functioning' if simply allowed to develop without management. It is likely that the removal of defences along parts of the SMP frontage would result in the breakdown of beaches, with little or no protection of the land behind from erosion and flooding.

The consequences of this, given the extent of development along parts of the coast, would be catastrophic, as thousands of homes and businesses lie within the potential risk areas.

As such, it is the social and economic sustainability of the SMP area which has driven policy selection for the majority of the developed areas of this frontage. However, policies leading to a more 'natural' shoreline in the long-term have been identified where feasible.



Source: Photograph © Angela Proctor, 2009

## Background to the North Devon and Somerset SMP

In 1998 and 2000, the original Shoreline Management Plans for the coastline from Bridgwater Bay to Bideford Bay and the Severn Estuary, were completed and adopted. These identified coastal defence management policies for a 50 year period.

Since completion of these SMPs, a number of studies and schemes have been developed based upon the policies they recommended. The outcomes of these studies have been used to inform the development of this SMP review.



Source: Photograph © Sue Dixon, 2005, www.oursouthwest.com

## The SMP Review

Recognising the need for review of the original SMP policies, the North Devon and Somerset Coastal Advisory Group commissioned consulting engineers Halcrow Group Ltd (Halcrow) to review policies between Hartland Point, Devon and Anchor Head (Weston-super-Mare), Somerset. Review of the wider Severn Estuary has been undertaken separately.

The review was commissioned to take account of:

- Latest coastal studies and monitoring information;
- Issues identified by most recent defence planning;
- Changes in legislation (e.g. European Union Habitats Directive);
- Changes in national flood and coastal defence planning policy requirements (e.g. the need to consider a time frame of at least 100 years rather than the original 50 years).

**This summary presents an overview of the policies that have been formally adopted. Full details of policies for individual sections of coast and estuary are provided in the main SMP document (see page 8 for details). It should be noted that, although these policies have been formally adopted, this does not guarantee funding will be provided to implement policies in the future.**

## The Policy Appraisal Process

The 100 year appraisal time frame forces us to look beyond the anticipated life of coastal defence structures and into a period when climate change will have a significant impact on coastal management. This is an important change from the original SMP.

The coastal process review determines the way natural forces will shape the shoreline (taking account of climate change and sea level rise). It begins by looking at a 'no active intervention' scenario to identify what could happen to the coastline over the next 100 years if all defences were allowed to deteriorate and fail.

Considering this scenario, areas potentially affected by coastal erosion and flooding can be identified and objectives associated with their future management defined, e.g. protection of properties and environmental enhancement. These objectives are, in part, defined through the involvement of those with an interest in the coast, including communities.

The creation of objectives under different policy approaches is then used to determine the recommended policies for the next 100 years. In this way, policy is set with full acknowledgement of its potential impact on environmental, financial and social assets along the coast.

An overview of the recommended policies for each section of coast is presented on the reverse of this leaflet. Full details for smaller sections of coastline and estuary within each area are presented in the main SMP document.

## Policy Options

There are 4 shoreline management policies to be considered, as defined by Defra.

These are:

- **Hold the Line**  
*Maintain or change the level of protection provided by defences in their present location.*
- **Advance the Line**  
*Build new defences on the seaward side of the existing defence line to reclaim land.*
- **Managed Realignment**  
*Allowing the shoreline position to move backwards (or forwards) with management to control or limit movement.*
- **No Active Intervention**  
*A decision not to invest in providing or maintaining defences.*

## The North Devon and Somerset Coastal Advisory Group

The North Devon and Somerset Coastal Advisory Group (NDASCAG) includes the 5 Local Authorities that lie within the boundaries of the SMP, the Environment Agency and other key bodies. These include Natural England, Devon County Council, Somerset County Council, English Heritage, The National Trust, Exmoor National Park Authority and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The Local Authorities and Environment Agency have responsibility for protecting the coastline and estuaries. The Local Authorities mainly deal with defences that protect the coast from erosion by the sea. The Environment Agency deals with flood risk management and has a strategic overview for all aspects of flood and coastal erosion risk management.

Defra require production of SMPs for sustainable coastal defence management. The development of this Plan was led by the NDASCAG, with guidance and funding provided by Defra.



Source: Photograph © Halcrow Group

## Partner and Community Engagement

Greater involvement of partners and communities in the appraisal process is one of the key changes from the first SMP. This has included the formation of a Client Steering Group (CSG), regular communication with elected members and partners and public consultation at key stages throughout development of the SMP. All have input information to the process and reviewed and commented on outputs as the study progressed.

This involvement has provided representation of the interests of landowners and residents. The views of those affected by SMP policies have been taken into account during its development, ensuring that all relevant issues are considered.

The CSG comprises all members of the NDASCAG, and has a remit to agree the various stages and outputs of the SMP as it progresses. All changes to the SMP following public consultation have been agreed by the CSG and Elected Members.

## Further Information

The North Devon and Somerset Shoreline Management Plan, including supporting appendices, can be viewed and downloaded at the North Devon and Somerset Coastal Advisory Group website: [www.ndascag.org](http://www.ndascag.org).

Full copies of the Shoreline Management Plan can also be viewed at the following offices:

- Torridge District Council, Bideford
- North Devon Council, Barnstaple
- Devon County Council, Exeter
- West Somerset Council, Williton
- Sedgemoor District Council, Bridgwater
- North Somerset Council, Weston-super-Mare
- Somerset County Council, Taunton
- Exmoor National Park Authority, Dulverton
- Environment Agency, Bridgwater and Exeter.

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[www.ndascag.org](http://www.ndascag.org)

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