



CABINET

TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2014

**SHORELINE MANAGEMENT PLAN POLICY CHANGE THORPENESS
(CAB 07/14)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Shoreline Management Plan policy for the frontage at Thorpeness is proposed to be changed from 'No Active Intervention (recognising the potential need for minor works subject to local impacts)' to "Managed Realignment over all epochs until 2105".
2. An extensive public consultation has been undertaken and 91% of those who expressed an opinion supported the change
3. This change will not guarantee protection to the village but will provide greater flexibility for the District Council working with the Environment Agency and Thorpeness community to respond in the event of short term spikes of erosion. The overall approach to managing this stretch of coastline is unchanged.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open

Wards Affected:	Aldringham cum Thorpe
------------------------	-----------------------

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Andy Smith
------------------------	-----------------

Supporting Officer:	Name Bill Parker Job Title Head of Coastal Management Telephone Number 01294 444553 Email address bill.parker@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) was approved by SCDC Cabinet in November 2011 and subsequently ratified by the Regional Director of the Environment Agency.
- 1.2 Shoreline Management Plans identify the intention of management for each section of the coastline in England and Wales at a strategic level. This is broken down into three time periods (epochs) of short (to 2025) medium (2026 to 2055) and long term (2056 to 2105). The coastline has been subdivided through a defined hierarchy to the lowest level where a continuous stretch of coastline has the same policy approach for each epoch, this is a management unit.
- 1.3 A framework for updating of SMP policies has been identified by the Environment Agency and its implementation in Suffolk and all changes to the SMP of a major kind (such as a change in policy) require certain criteria to be met. The criteria relevant to Thorpeness include:
- Severe event has made the existing SMP policy or action plan untenable – ongoing erosion pressures at Thorpeness
 - New evidence from further investigation into local options – The PAR (Project Assessment Review) for the two phases of bag defences
 - Textual corrections or clarification – resolution of ambiguities in the SMP text.
- 1.4 The approval process for a major change in SMP policy includes; initial agreement from the Suffolk Coast Forum (as agreed 10/09/13), public consultation (undertaken during November and December 2013) and approval by cabinet.
- Once approved by SCDC Cabinet a change in policy has to be notified to the Eastern River Flood Coastal Committee before final signature from the Environment Agency Regional Director.

2 THORPENESS SMP POLICY CHANGE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The current approved Shoreline Management Policy (SMP) for Thorpeness village frontage (located in management units Min13.3 and Ald14.1) is 'No Active Intervention (recognising the potential need for minor works subject to local impacts)' in the short and medium term. In the long term the policy for the northern part of this village frontage is "Managed Realignment" but the southern part is "No Active Intervention".
- 2.2 The Thorpeness coastline was forecast by the SMP to have a long term trend of low erosion by the sea but with spikes of erosion activity. A series of events since 2010 has confirmed the potential for significant erosion pressure (a potential spike) on this stretch of coastline.
- 2.3 This has required active management and a contribution by a number of partners including the community, Environment Agency and SCDC to two phases of soft defence works. The present SMP policy wording is regarded as potentially unhelpful regarding the ongoing management of this.
- 2.4 The proposed change to policy does not mean that Thorpeness will be automatically defended but it does allow greater flexibility for the District Council and Environment Agency to work with the local community to develop a way forward that gives appropriate weight to the aspirations of the community within the broader context of environmental sustainability.
- 2.5 It is also felt that the proposed policy definition is a better fit for both the management activity so far and the underlying intent for management for the frontage, as described in the SMP and this will not change.
- 2.6 The proposed new policy is "Managed Realignment" for all epochs over both management units (Min13.3 and Ald14.1). The Defra definition of "Managed

Realignment” is *‘the shoreline to move backwards or forwards, with management to control or limit movement.’*

- 2.7 Community consultation undertaken between 14th November and 13th December 2013 (see below) supports the change in policy.
- 2.8 54 respondents highlighted that their preference was for a “Hold the Line” policy. Whilst this understandable this option is not felt to be appropriate for this location (see section 6 - other options considered).
- 2.9 The proposed policy change and consultation process has been developed in partnership with community representatives.

3 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The change in SMP policy in itself does not commit the District Council to additional financial expenditure as the District Council has permissive powers regarding coast protection.
- 3.2 The investment made to date with the two current phases of soft defence has been jointly made with the Environment Agency and funding from the local Community (£127k).
- 3.3 Whilst the defences have delivered coast protection as planned, a combination of their design and unexpectedly harsh environmental conditions mean that they are fragile. It is anticipated that further investment will be required to maintain their function to control sea erosion. Work is currently underway to identify the most effective way forward on this.
- 3.4 The change in policy was initiated by SCDC and was agreed by Suffolk County Council, the Environment Agency and Natural England officers.
- 3.5 The policy change was submitted to and agreed by Suffolk Coast Forum, subject to community positive consultation. The Suffolk Coast Forum has representation from:
 - Four Estuary Partnerships (Blyth, Alde and Ore, Deben and Stour and Orwell)
 - SCAR – a community based organisation
 - Local authorities in Suffolk with a coast
 - Government Agencies including Natural England, Environment Agency and Marine Management Organisation
 - Internal Drainage Board
 - Chairman of the Regional Flood and Coast Committee
 - Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 3.6 The wording of the SMP is to contain the following caveat to ensure that any future proposed works are fully sustainable.

Sustainability means that, either public funding or private funding, or both, are available for a justifiable business case, and that practical engineering solutions are available which are compatible with coastal processes. Sustainability may vary along the Thorpeness village frontage and policy designations should allow for this.

- 3.7 The consultation highlighted amongst some members of the community that the policy change should be to “Hold the Line”. There is a risk that there is an expectation of this, in the information provided during the consultation to the public it was addressed as follows:

The proposed change to policy does not mean that Thorpeness will be automatically defended but it does allow greater flexibility for the District Council and Environment Agency to work with the local community to develop a way forward that gives appropriate weight to the aspirations of the community within the broader context of environmental sustainability.

- 3.8 The development of the change in SMP policy, the consultation process and the planning of future works has been undertaken both with the statutory bodies but also with the Thorpeness Coastal Futures Group a very active and engaged local community group working on behalf of the Parish Council.

4 OTHER KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 This report has been prepared having taken into account the results of an Equality Impact Assessment, a Sustainability Impact Assessment and a Partnership Impact Assessment. There are no issues arising.
- 4.2 Natural England has confirmed that this change has no implications on the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 A change in SMP policy is regarded under the Environment Agency SMP change framework as a major change. This requires a public consultation before this change can be progressed to local authority approval.
- 5.2 The consultation was run from 14th November 2013 to 13th December 2013 via an online 'survey monkey' through the SCDC website, a drop-in session at the Mess Café on 28th November 2013 where approx 60 people attended and by mail.
- 5.3 The consultation was promoted both online, in the press, a door drop to every house in Thorpeness, posters in prominent positions around the village and through the local Thorpeness Coastal Futures Group.
- 5.4 A total of 370 responses were received, which when multiple responses from individuals are removed, was still an exceptional total of 350 responses. Where 2 responses had been submitted the latest response was taken as the preferred option.
- 5.5 200 of the respondents were either or a combination of the following: property owner, resident, potential resident, business owner or employee. The remaining 150 were: frequent or occasional visitor or not disclosed.
- 5.6 Of 350 respondents, 98 did not express a preference (agree or disagree) with the proposed change in SMP policy. It is unknown why this is such a significant figure; no one contacted the Coastal Management Team to express any concern about the clarity of the consultation or specifically the question being asked.
- 5.7 Of all 350 respondents 65.4% agreed with the policy change and 5.7% disagreed. 28.0% did not answer
- 5.8 If only those who expressed a preference are counted 90.9% agreed, 7.9% disagreed and 1.25% was undecided.
- 5.9 In the open ended response section 130 (37.1%) of the respondents made one or more additional comment.
- 5.9.1 54 respondents supported "Managed Realignment" but wanted "Hold the Line" where properties are at risk or highlighted "Hold the Line" as their preference.
- 5.9.2 5 respondents advocated managed realignment and or have soft defences whilst realigning buildings
- 5.9.3 2 respondents said erosion was inevitable and defences would not last long
- 5.9.4 19 were either undecided or wanted to be kept informed
- 5.9.5 66 respondents wanted to save the area long term – but this comment could be interpreted in a number of different ways.
- 5.10 Overall there was strong support for the change in SMP policy.

6 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 The other options considered were as follows:

- No change from the current policy – This would have potentially restricted the options for managing the coast in future and there were sufficient grounds to change the policy. In addition community representation highlighted the need for change to the policy.
- Hold the Line policy – This was considered but it was discounted due to; technical challenges to deliver this option within a realistic and affordable budget, potential impact on coastal processes and long term sustainability issues, concern about a public message that would encourage further development in the area putting more people at risk.

7 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

7.1 There is a consensus between those agencies that manage the coast in Suffolk as well as significant support from the local community for the proposed change to this SMP policy.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Cabinet approves the change for the Shoreline Management Plan policy for Management Units Min13.3 and Ald14.1 (Thorpeness)

from: 'No Active Intervention (recognising the potential need for minor works subject to local impacts)' in the short and medium term and in the long term the policy for the northern part of this village frontage is Managed Realignment but the southern part is No Active Intervention

to: Managed Realignment across both Management Units and across all three epochs.

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Thorpeness Consultation - full results (excluding individual names and contact details)
Appendix B	Suffolk Coast Forum SMP Policy Change Proposal Paper 15 th May 2013

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Date	Type	Available From
May 2012	Shoreline Management Plan 7 (Approved)	http://www.suffolksmp2.org.uk/policy/index.php