

Cabinet

19 May 2025

Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation & Shore Road Improvement Projects

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr J Andrews, Place Services

Local Councillor(s):

Cllr. G Suttle & Cllr. C Tomes

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton - Executive Director, Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth

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Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Swanage's seafront plays a central role in the town's identity, community life and visitor economy. However, increasing ground instability of the Green Seafront and longstanding accessibility issues along Shore Road now present escalating risks to public safety, highway network resilience and the long-term sustainability of this important seafront environment. These pressures are expected to intensify as a result of climate change, sea-level rise and more extreme weather events.
- 1.2 Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council have worked closely to develop two complementary projects to address ground instability affecting the Green Seafront and the longstanding safety and accessibility concerns along Shore Road.
- 1.3 Dorset Council's contribution to the Green Seafront project will stabilise part of the highway that is subject to ground movement. This collaborative working helps to ensure that stability issues on the Green Seafront do not further affect Dorset Council's highway network.
- 1.4 Swanage Town Council's Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation Project responds to confirmed evidence of progressive ground movement across Sandpit Field and adjoining areas. Professional monitoring has identified extensive defects affecting retaining structures, access routes and public spaces. Without intervention, continued deterioration would be likely to result in

progressive restrictions on access, increased unplanned highway maintenance and heightened public safety risk.

- 1.5 Swanage Town Council has developed a Strategic Outline Business Case which confirms that intervention is necessary, deliverable and aligned with local, regional and national policy objectives. Through public engagement, a preferred 'New Option' has been identified, delivering improved accessibility, enhanced biodiversity, increased climate resilience and adaptation along with wider community and economic benefits, at an estimated cost of £6.9 million. Swanage Town Council has secured £4.4 million towards the project and is seeking a £2.5 million capital grant from Dorset Council to address the remaining funding gap and complete the stabilisation necessary to support Dorset Council's highway.
- 1.6 Dorset Council's Shore Road Improvement Project addresses pedestrian safety, accessibility and public realm quality along a key seafront route. Following feasibility work and public engagement, a preferred option has been identified at an estimated cost of £2.5 million. Dorset Council has already committed £0.5 million through its Local Transport Grant. Approval is sought for a further £2 million from the Local Transport Grant to enable delivery.
- 1.7 Taken together, the projects represent a coordinated capital investment of £5 million by Dorset Council. This comprises £2.5 million of direct funding to support the stabilisation element of the Green Seafront project and £2.5 million for the Shore Road improvements, funded through the Department for Transport's Local Transport Grant.
- 1.8 The projects support the Council Plan 2024–2029 priorities and will help secure the long-term safety, resilience and quality of Swanage's seafront for residents, visitors and future generations. Helping Swanage to thrive now and into the future.

2. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet approves the following:

- 2.1 Cabinet approves funding of £2.5 million as a capital grant for the New Option of Swanage Town Council's Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation Project; and, delegates authority to agree the terms and enter into a grant agreement for this purpose to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and Dorset Council's Section 151 Officer.
- 2.2 Cabinet approves allocation of £2.5 million funding from the Local Transport Grant for the Shore Road Highway Improvement Project; and, delegates authority to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services to update the Highway Improvements Capital Programme.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The recommendations support targeted investment in two complementary seafront projects in Swanage that directly contribute to Dorset Council's priorities of responding to the climate and nature crisis, supporting communities for all and growing the local economy. The Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation Project is required to address identified ground instability, protect public safety and secure the long-term resilience of a key coastal asset that supports year-round community use, major events and the visitor economy.
- 3.2 The Shore Road Improvement Project responds to safety, accessibility and public realm concerns along a prominent seafront route, improving pedestrian priority, accessibility and connections between the town centre, beach and seafront. Together, the projects deliver inclusive public spaces and sustainable investment that benefits residents, visitors and the wider local economy.

4. Strategic case and proposed approach

- 4.1 The Seafront is a central element of Swanage's identity, supporting everyday recreation, major events and the town's visitor economy. Tourism in Swanage is worth £77 million per annum to Dorset's economy, supporting over 1000 jobs within the town. Events on Sandpit Field alone attract over 100,000 visitors a year.



Swanage Seafront – Green Seafront Edged Red

- 4.2 There is a clear and escalating case for intervention on the Green Seafront. Ground instability has led to subsidence, cracking and progressive deterioration, affecting structural elements and key access routes across the area. Traffic management measures are currently in place on Walrond Road to protect public safety and instability is already affecting the highway network on De Moulham Road which is above and retained by the Green Seafront.
- 4.3 Professional monitoring and inspection provide clear evidence of the scale and severity of the issue. Recent monitoring has identified 56 defects (February 2026), demonstrating widespread deterioration across retaining walls, steps, paths and associated structures.

- 4.4 Without intervention, deterioration is expected to continue, increasing the likelihood of further access restrictions, disruption and reactive maintenance costs affecting both the Green Seafront and the surrounding highway network. In the worst case, further ground movement could result in sudden structural failure and the loss of key areas of the site, with consequential impacts on the adjacent highway.
- 4.5 The strategic importance of the Green Seafront will increase as climate change and sea level rise place greater pressure on beaches and adjacent public space. Failure to intervene risks public safety, loss of amenity, damage to the town's reputation and negative economic impacts for Swanage and neighbouring parishes.
- 4.6 In response to these issues, Swanage Town Council has developed the Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation Project. This project aims to address ground instability affecting the Green Seafront, ensuring the site remains safe, accessible and functional for public use over the long-term, while protecting and enhancing a vital community and economic asset.
- 4.7 The Town Council has produced a Strategic Outline Business Case to support the project which documents the rationale, options and proposed approach. The business case confirms that intervention is necessary and justified, provides confidence that delivery is feasible, supports the case for grant funding and sets out the basis for progressing to planning, market engagement and procurement of the construction contract by the Town Council.
- 4.8 The business case identifies that the project aligns with local, regional and national strategies and policies. It is embedded within Swanage Town Council's corporate priorities and seafront improvement ambitions, supporting wider objectives relating to sustainable tourism, community wellbeing, accessibility and climate resilience / adaptation.
- 4.9 Extensive public engagement has been undertaken for the Green Seafront project, including two rounds of engagement in 2023 and 2025, building on a wider Seafront Masterplan consultation in 2022.
- 4.10 In the second round of engagement, views were sought on a previously presented Essential Option and an alternative New Option. The preferred New Option aims to deliver many of the benefits of an earlier enhanced option but at a significantly lower cost, currently estimated at £6.9m. Whilst the Essential Option would address immediate stabilisation, it would not deliver the same level of accessibility, economic resilience or long-term value for money as the preferred New Option.
- 4.11 The New Option proposes a comprehensive and integrated approach to stabilising the Green Seafront while delivering significant improvements to accessibility, public realm quality, biodiversity and seafront facilities. It would create a continuous and more resilient Green Seafront, enhance the area's role as an events and recreational space and deliver wider community, economic and environmental benefits. Key elements of the New Option include:

- Filling in Walrond Road to create a continuous Green Seafront and enhanced events space spanning Sandpit Field and Weather Station Field.
 - Two new fully accessible pathways linking Shore Road to the Green Seafront, alongside a new internal pathway around the events space and broader accessibility improvements across the site.
 - A new toilet block on Shore Road providing accessible public toilets.
 - A new plaza area providing a seafront kiosk café and seating area next to Shore Road.
 - Significant additional planting to enhance biodiversity, together with additional trees to provide shade.
 - A secondary events space, offering an area suitable for families and small groups with views along the bay.
 - Improvements to the Spa Beach Hut area, including 46 new beach huts and accessible chalets, an accessible toilet for chalet users and an overall improved appearance and functionality.
 - Increased seating throughout the site, including new sculptural, stepped seating offering views across the bay.
- 4.12 Engagement related to the Green Seafront in 2022 and 2023 highlighted wider public concerns about Shore Road, including narrow footways, traffic management issues and parked cars reducing visibility for pedestrians crossing the road.
- 4.13 A feasibility study completed by Dorset Highways explored how Shore Road could be redesigned to address these issues. Potential upgrades included wider pavements, improved crossings, cycle facilities, bus stop improvements and new public realm features. These showed how the road layout could prioritise people while maintaining necessary access.
- 4.14 Dorset Coast Forum carried out engagement in summer 2025 alongside the Green Seafront project. Participants were asked about their preferences on four options, along with views on pedestrian improvements, crossings, parking, bus routing, cycle facilities, surfacing, planting and signage.
- 4.15 Following a detailed review of technical evidence, public feedback and site constraints, the Cabinet Member for Place identified that retaining two-way traffic while removing on-street parking was the preferred approach in-line with public preference.
- 4.16 Key Features of the Preferred Option:
- Changes to the streetscape will extend from just south of Ocean Bay Slipway to the junction of Victoria Avenue with De Moulham Road.
 - Footway widths are to be increased on the beach side of Shore Road up to approximately 2.5m.
 - Reduced speed limit on Shore Road from 30 to 20 mph.

- Parking is removed from Shore Road. Blue badge parking spaces and short term set down / pick up spaces created on one side of the Eastern section of Victoria Avenue with dedicated blue badge bays on De Moulham Road.
- Carriageway narrowing at pedestrian crossing points to slow vehicle speeds with crossings aligned to Green Seafront access points.
- Higher quality materials introduced at key locations to provide clear indication to drivers of pedestrian presence whilst helping partially sighted people to interpret the space.
- Provision of safe crossing points on De Moulham Road to improve access to the Green Seafront and onwards to Swanage beach.
- Updated wayfinding signage to help pedestrians and drivers navigate to key destinations.
- Changes to the junction of Northbrook Road and Victoria Avenue to improve visibility.

4.17 The Green Seafront and Shore Road projects have clear interdependencies and significant benefits arising from coordinated delivery. Shore Road will need to be closed during construction of the Green Seafront project and the carriageway may also require resurfacing after the works. Coordinating the delivery of both projects therefore provides an opportunity to minimise disruption to residents, businesses and the visitor economy, while ensuring efficient use of public funds and a cohesive approach to improving the seafront environment.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 Four strategic options for the Green Seafront Ground Stabilisation Project have been developed and assessed by Swanage Town Council with close involvement and input from Dorset Council officers. The options have been evaluated against a set of critical success factors, including public safety, asset protection, economic resilience, accessibility, value for money and statutory compliance:

- a. Do nothing.
- b. Asset disposal.
- c. Do minimum intervention.
- d. Full re-stabilisation.

5.2 The appraisal concluded that the first three options (a, b and c) fail to manage risk adequately, do not meet project objectives and would result in unacceptable long-term consequences. Full re-stabilisation (d) is the only option that delivers the required outcomes and has therefore been taken forward. With full re-stabilisation identified as the strategic approach, deliverable design variants were developed and taken to public engagement.

- 5.3 Swanage Town Council has considered all reasonable funding options:
- Asset disposal would not generate sufficient funding and would undermine the Town Council's strategic objectives and financial sustainability.
 - Borrowing is unaffordable due to a combination of loan repayment costs and the significant impact on the Town Council's revenue budgets from the loss of interest on investment income.
 - Exploration of grant applications, including an approach to the National Lottery Heritage Fund have been unsuccessful and no further eligible grants for significant capital funding have been identified.
- 5.4 For the Shore Road project, the following alternative options were examined through feasibility work and public engagement:
- Full pedestrianisation of Shore Road, delivering significant pedestrian space but raising concerns around access, traffic displacement, servicing and emergency access.
 - A one-way traffic system, which reduced some conflicts but introduced wider network impacts and received mixed public support.
 - Do nothing, which did not address existing safety, access and public-realm concerns.
- 5.5 The preferred option of retaining two-way traffic while removing on-street parking provides a balanced solution. It delivers clear improvements to pedestrian safety and streetscape quality while maintaining essential vehicle access. This option was ranked highest overall during public engagement and offers a deliverable, value-for-money approach.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 The Town Council owns Sandpit and Weather Station Fields in its capacity as the sole corporate trustee of two charities. The Town Council cannot invest capital funding into land held in charitable trust. An application has been submitted to the Charity Commission to transfer ownership to the Town Council.
- 6.2 The preferred New Option requires the infilling of the eastern section of Walrond Road, which will require a stopping-up order to extinguish highway rights. An application will be submitted to the Secretary of State alongside the planning application, with in-principle support already received from the Highway Authority and relevant statutory undertakers.
- 6.3 The Shore Road scheme will require amendments to Traffic Regulation Orders, with formal consultation anticipated in autumn 2026.
- 6.4 Dorset Council officers are providing project management and professional consultancy services to Swanage Town Council, including access to existing Dorset Highways contracts where required. These arrangements have been formalised through a Collaboration Agreement between Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council.

- 6.5 The grant to Swanage Town Council can be given under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. This will be formalised through a grant agreement to be entered into by Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council.
- 6.6 This grant could constitute a subsidy for the purposes of the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which applies even though the recipient is a public body. This subsidy can be given under the Community and Regeneration streamlined route – strand 1 category 2 – because the grant is for the purposes of improving or creating new community infrastructure. The maximum subsidy value under this route is £2.5 million and the grant must not form more than 80% of the total project costs.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Swanage Town Council currently has £4.4 million in capital funding allocated to the Green Seafront project. This is made up of capital reserves and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions – detailed in the following table:

Funding Source	Amount
Swanage Town Council Capital Receipts Reserve	£1,700,000
Swanage Town Council Earmarked Reserves	£1,910,000
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – Swanage Town Council	£2890,000
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – Dorset Council	£500,000
Total	£4,400,000

- 7.2 The estimated capital cost for the Green Seafront is set out in the following table. These estimates have been produced by Heidelberg Materials Ltd. which is engaged to provide Early Contractor Involvement (ECI). The estimates are based on a September 2027 construction start date with inflation included.

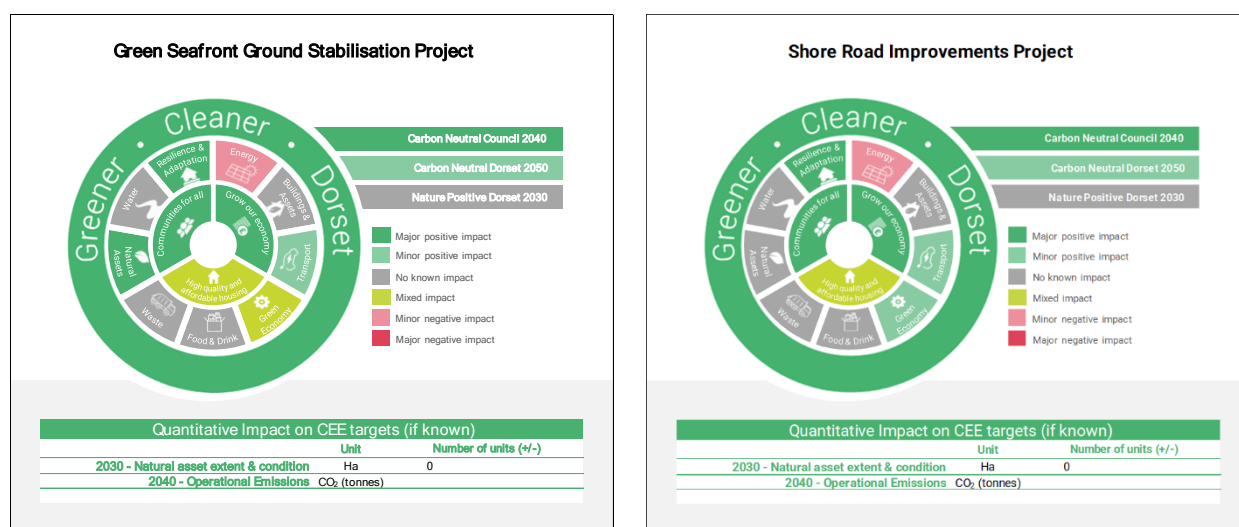
Current Financial Position	
Cost of Scheme	£6,900,000
Funding Available	£4,400,000
Funding Gap	£2,500,000

- 7.3 The New Option is preferred due to its wider economic and community benefits but is not currently affordable without additional funding. Swanage Town Council is seeking £2.5 million from Dorset Council as a capital grant to close the funding gap and enable delivery of the preferred New Option. There are no additional liabilities or ongoing revenue costs to Dorset Council associated with this project.
- 7.4 It is estimated that the cost to deliver the preferred option for Shore Road will be £2.5 million. Cabinet approved £500,000 funding from the Local Transport Grant (LTG) for the Shore Road Improvement project in November 2025, part of the Highways Capital Programme Forward Plan. The recommendations in

this report represent an increase of £2 million funding from the LTG to deliver the preferred option for Shore Road.

- 7.5 The removal of on-street parking is expected to result in a loss of parking income for Dorset Council, estimated at approximately £80,000 per annum. This is offset by reduced maintenance liability, environmental and accessibility benefits along with wider economic benefits.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



- 8.1 The Green Seafront project supports Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency ambitions, delivering major positive impacts on natural assets, ecology and climate adaptation through long-term stabilisation of the seafront.
- 8.2 The project will deliver biodiversity enhancements through habitat creation, native planting and at least 10% biodiversity net gain, contributing to local nature recovery objectives.
- 8.3 A minor negative impact on energy is identified from new low-level lighting required for safety, which will be mitigated through energy-efficient, sensitively designed solutions.
- 8.4 The preferred Shore Road option supports Dorset Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency commitments, by rebalancing the street in favour of pedestrians and creating a safer seafront environment.
- 8.5 Transport benefits include reduced vehicle dominance, removal of on-street parking and improved pedestrian connectivity, encouraging walking, reducing congestion and lowering transport-related emissions while maintaining essential access.
- 8.6 A minor, temporary negative impact on energy use during construction is anticipated and will be mitigated through efficient construction practices.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The preferred options for the Green Seafront and Shore Road projects will deliver significant wellbeing and public health benefits by improving the quality, safety and usability of Swanage's seafront.
- 9.2 The Green Seafront project will protect and enhance an important area of open space, supporting physical activity, relaxation and community events through significantly improved access, surfacing and landscaping, while contributing to improved mental wellbeing in a higher-quality seafront setting.
- 9.3 The Shore Road project complements these benefits by reducing vehicle dominance and improving pedestrian safety, with wider footways and safer crossings encouraging walking and healthier lifestyles.
- 9.4 Combined, the projects will strengthen connections between the town centre, beach and seafront, creating a more cohesive and welcoming environment, with construction impacts managed through coordinated delivery to minimise disruption.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None identified.

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 Failure to progress stabilisation works would ultimately expose Dorset Council, as Highway Authority, to future unplanned liabilities and reactive intervention costs should ground movement impact Shore Road or De Moulham Road. In addition, the loss of public access to these large-scale event spaces would cause a significantly detrimental impact to the visitor economy.
- 11.2 The principal risks for the Green Seafront project relate to funding certainty and affordability of the preferred New Option. Planning permission will be sought for both options to mitigate risk associated with funding availability and cost uncertainty until tender responses are received, expected in early 2027.
- 11.3 The principal risks for the Shore Road project relate to securing sufficient funding to deliver the preferred option. There is also risk linked to public and stakeholder response to changes in parking and traffic management arrangements via a future Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) consultation.
- 11.4 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High
Residual Risk: Medium-Low
- 11.5 Approval of the recommendations materially reduces Dorset Council's exposure to safety, liability and future unplanned capital intervention. Residual risk is considered medium low as the greatest risks relating to funding will be

mitigated. Remaining risks primarily relate to potential cost escalation and timescales for securing statutory consents, both of which are managed through phased design development, ECI, early procurement planning and established governance / financial controls.

12. Equalities

- 12.1 The Green Seafront and Shore Road projects have been through Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs). Overall, both schemes are expected to deliver neutral to positive equalities outcomes and support Dorset Council's objective of communities for all.
- 12.2 For the Green Seafront, the preferred New Option delivers positive impacts to older people, disabled people, families and carers through enhanced accessibility, improved facilities and a wider range of usable, inclusive spaces, with no negative impacts identified for any protected groups.
- 12.3 The Shore Road preferred option improves pedestrian safety and accessibility through wider footways, reduced vehicle speeds and safer crossings, benefiting older people, disabled people, families and carers. The removal of on-street parking may have short-term impacts for some Blue Badge users. However, this will be mitigated through dedicated Blue Badge parking, pick-up and drop-off points and improved access routes.

13. Appendices

- A. Green Seafront EqIA.
- B. Shore Road EqIA.

14. Background papers

- 1. Green Seafront – Strategic Outline Business Case.
- 2. Green Seafront – Monitoring Report February 2026.
- 3. Green Seafront – New Option Layout.
- 4. Green Seafront – Engagement Outcome Report.
- 5. Shore Road – Preferred Option Concept Design.
- 6. Shore Road – Engagement Outcome Report.
- 7. Cabinet Report (November '25) – Highways Capital Programme Strategy.

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).