

Cabinet

6 October 2026

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre Rollback Scheme (Hensleigh House Acquisition)

For Decision

Cabinet Member: 06/10/26

Cllr Jack Jeanes, Economy & Environment

Local Councillor:

Cllr Belinda Bawden

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton – Executive Director, Economy & Environment

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Statutory Authority: Dorset Council

Report status: Part Exempt Para 3

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

The aim of this report is to obtain Cabinet approval for Dorset Council to transfer Environment Agency Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme (CTAP) funding (see Exempt Appendix A for financial implications) to Charmouth Parish Council for the purpose of facilitating the acquisition of Hensleigh House (or a suitable alternative in the event that this property is deemed during the conveyancing process to be unsuitable or otherwise becomes unavailable). The acquisition would enable a future relocation of the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre (CHCC), a nationally recognised tourism, education and scientific asset that is expected to become increasingly vulnerable to coastal erosion in the coming decades and potentially uninsurable in consequence, and as such unusable in the shorter term.

Charmouth is one of two Dorset communities selected to receive investment through the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme. The Cabinet-approved Dorset CTAP Outline Business Case identified the rollback of vulnerable community assets as a priority adaptation measure, with the future relocation of the CHCC identified as a key

project. Rollback involves securing land or property inland to enable the relocation of assets threatened by coastal erosion and climate change.

The proposal is fully externally funded through CTAP and is supported in principle by the Environment Agency, subject to satisfactory governance, legal and planning arrangements. Dorset Council's role is to facilitate the acquisition and ensure that the public funds achieve the intended coastal adaptation outcomes. Ownership and operation of the property shall be the responsibility of Charmouth Parish Council, and this position is accepted and agreed by Charmouth Parish Council.

The funding must be committed and spent by 31st March 2027. Approval of this recommendation will enable progress towards securing a strategically significant community asset, delivering a key commitment within the Future Coast Dorset programme and supporting the long-term resilience of Charmouth in response to coastal change.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- i. Approves the transfer of Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme funding (see Exempt Appendix A) to Charmouth Parish Council for the acquisition of Hensleigh House (or a suitable alternative);
- ii. Approves Dorset Council acting as facilitator and enabling authority for the acquisition in support of the Future Coast Dorset programme;
- iii. Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Economy & Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, to finalise and enter into all necessary funding agreements, legal agreements and associated documentation and take all incidental decisions relating to the matter;
- iv. Approves the Executive Director for Economy & Environment be delegated to sign the requisite PMG1 and Sealing Form; and
- v. Authorises officers to proceed with the transfer, subject to satisfactory valuation, survey, planning, legal and funding compliance outcomes.

3. Reason for the recommendations

The recommendation supports delivery of the Cabinet-approved Dorset CTAP Outline Business Case and the objectives of the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme.

The proposal will:

- enable delivery of a key coastal adaptation project;
- support the long-term resilience of Charmouth against coastal erosion;
- secure a future rollback site for the CHCC;
- protect the future of an important tourism, education and community asset;

- maximise the benefit of external government funding;
- contribute to Dorset Council priorities relating to climate adaptation and resilient communities; and
- provide effective use of the funding and reduce the risk of significant programme underspend before the funding deadline of 31st March 2027.

4. The report

4.1 Strategic Priority

The proposal supports the Dorset Council Plan strategic priority in '*Responding to the Climate and Nature Crisis*'. The proposal enables a proactive response to the impacts of climate change through coastal adaptation and long-term planning for unavoidable coastal erosion. The acquisition of Hensleigh House supports the rollback of the CHCC, reducing future exposure to coastal risk and helping the community adapt to changing shoreline conditions.

The proposal supports the Dorset Council Plan strategic priority of '*Communities for All*' through directly improving community resilience to coastal change, by securing a future location for an important community, education, visitor and tourism facility. The CHCC plays a significant role in Charmouth's identity and community life. The project will help to maintain community assets and services in the face of coastal change.

The proposal supports the Dorset Council Plan strategic priority to '*Grow our Economy*'. The CHCC is a key visitor attraction supporting the local tourism economy and the wider Jurassic Coast destination. Securing a long-term alternative location for this facility helps to protect economic activity, visitor spending and employment associated with tourism in Charmouth.

The proposal aligns with the approach of Central Government to managing flood and coastal erosion risk by supporting proactive adaptation to unavoidable coastal change. It contributes to the long-term ambition of creating places that are more resilient to future flood and coastal erosion risk through planned adaptation, rather than continued reliance on unsustainable coastal defence measures.

4.2 Background

In 2024 the Environment Agency approved the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme (CTAP) Outline Business Case (OBC), which provided Dorset Council with £3 million of external funding to deliver coastal adaptation across Charmouth and North Swanage through the Future Coast Dorset project.

The Shoreline Management Plan policy for Charmouth has transitioned from "Hold the Line" to "No Active Intervention", recognising that long-term maintenance of coastal defences is unlikely to be sustainable. More than 120 homes and businesses, tourism assets and sections of the South West Coast Path could be affected by coastal change

over the next century. The CHCC itself is projected to be lost to coastal erosion by approximately 2055 unless adaptation measures are implemented.

The project has engaged extensively with communities, building on the work delivered through the *2008 DEFRA Coastal Change Pathfinder Programme*, to identify viable opportunities to acquire land or property to secure a future site for the CHCC. One of the most significant opportunities identified is the acquisition of the 'Hensleigh House' property, which provides a significant opportunity to function as a future rollback site for the CHCC.

Charmouth Parish Council is willing to take ownership and management responsibility for the property, subject to Dorset Council transferring the acquisition funds and establishing appropriate legal and governance arrangements to protect public funds and ensure the property is purchased and used for its intended purpose.

4.3 The scheme directly supports:

- **National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (2020):** supporting the strategic objective of creating climate resilient places through proactive adaptation to coastal change and helping communities prepare for and respond to long-term coastal erosion risk
- **South Devon and Dorset Shoreline Management Plan Review 2 (2011):** supporting adaptation to the planned policy transition in Charmouth from "Hold the Line" to "No Active Intervention", recognising that long-term defence of the frontage is not considered sustainable.
- **Future Coast Dorset Outline Business Case (approved by Cabinet, December 2024):** delivering the approved "Asset and Property Rollback" intervention and facilitating the future relocation of the CHCC
- **Charmouth Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (Draft):** supporting the long-term adaptation of a community facing increasing risks from coastal erosion, landsliding and shoreline recession.

5. Alternative options considered

A range of alternative rollback options were considered, including the acquisition of undeveloped land, existing properties, and public sector sites within Charmouth. These options were assessed against criteria including availability, deliverability, planning and legal constraints, long-term resilience to coastal change, affordability, and alignment with the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme timescales. While several locations demonstrated potential, they were either unavailable, subject to significant legal or development constraints, no longer on the market, or presented challenges in providing a viable and deliverable future location for the CHCC. Hensleigh House emerged as the preferred option because it offers the most realistic opportunity to secure a suitable rollback asset within the available funding window and supports the long-term objectives of coastal adaptation in Charmouth.

6. Legal considerations

The proposal is for Dorset Council to provide acquisition funds to Charmouth Parish Council to enable the Parish Council to purchase the Hensleigh House property. Protection of the funds pre-acquisition and protection against misuse of the property post-acquisition are key priorities, and will be safeguarded in the following ways:

- Dorset Council will only release the purchase monies to the legal representatives of Charmouth Parish Council, and this will be strictly conditional on the funds being held to our order until completion; in the event that the property purchase fails to complete, the funds will be returned to Dorset Council.
- Dorset Council will require Charmouth Parish Council to enter into a funding agreement prior to the acquisition funds leaving the control of Dorset Council, and this agreement will contain contractual covenants requiring that Charmouth Parish Council:
 - (a) only use the funds for the agreed purposes, i.e. to purchase the property and carry out defined alteration works etc.;
 - (b) only use the property for the agreed purposes; and
 - (c) have restrictive and positive covenants entered against the title to the property in the terms outlined below
- Charmouth Parish Council shall enter into a deed of covenant with Dorset Council made pursuant to Section 33 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 and registered as a Local Land Charge which stipulates that:
 - (a) the property can only be used in the agreed manner, i.e. materially the same uses as the CCHC is currently being used together with any pre-agreed additional, supplemental or incidental uses; and
 - (b) in the event that the property is no longer required for such uses, financial controls will be imposed, for example a requirement to sell the property and return some or all of the funding

The above measures will provide Dorset Council with the ability to take legal action to enforce both its contractual rights under the funding agreement and to enforce the covenants in the event that the property is not used as intended.

Legal advice has been sought regarding compliance with subsidy control requirements and remains under review. Confirmation of the proposal's compliance with applicable subsidy control legislation will be obtained following the conclusion of that advice.

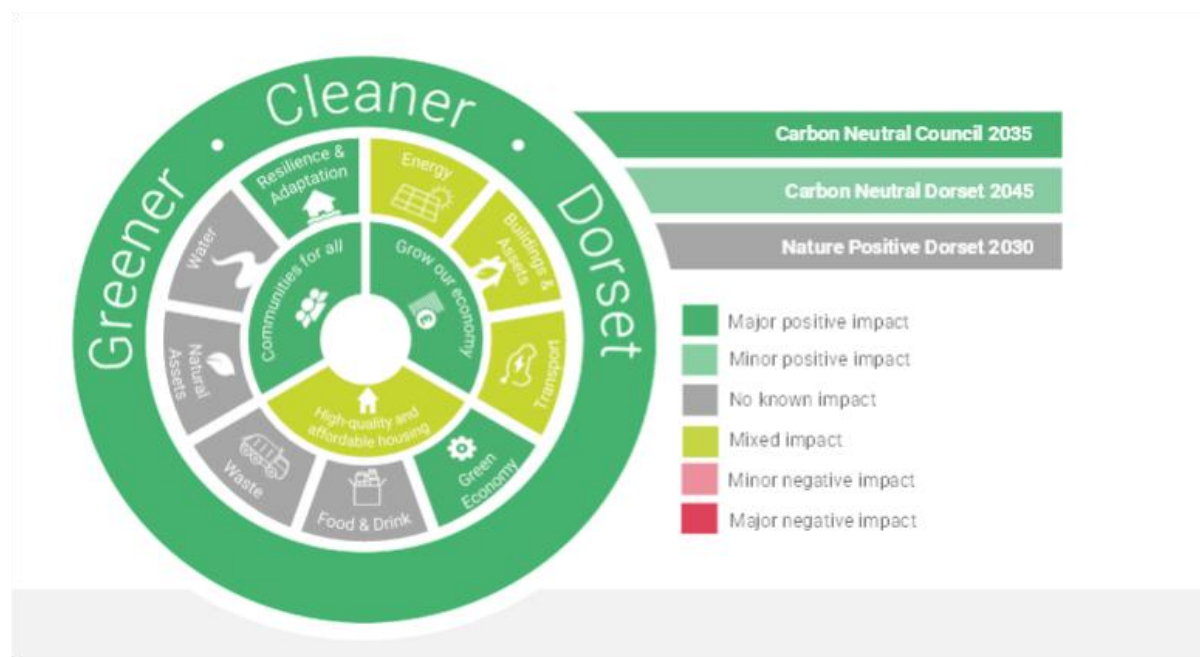
7. Financial implications

See Exempt Appendix A.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

The proposal to support the rollback of the CHCC will contribute to the long-term climate resilience of the community by proactively adapting to coastal change and the increasing risks of coastal erosion, as opposed to the previous promotion of coastal defence interventions. This approach is consistent with the current Shoreline Management Plan policy of 'No Active Intervention'.

The proposal involves the acquisition of an existing property for future community use. Re-use of an existing building is expected to reduce the need for any new construction works, with their associated carbon impacts.



ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	Mixed impact
Buildings & Assets	Mixed impact
Transport	Mixed impact
Green Economy	Major positive impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	Major positive impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	Major positive impact
High-quality and affordable housing	Neutral
Communities for all	Major positive impact

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
Support existing buildings to install onsite renewables like rooftop solar and flexibility measures	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council, to support the installation of renewable energies.
Support the deployment of low carbon heating, such as heat pumps and low carbon district heat networks	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council, to support the installation of low carbon heating.
Buildings & Assets	

Support the acceleration of heating and energy and water efficiency through cavity and solid wall insulation, draught proofing, improved glazing and shading, and high energy and water efficient smart appliances	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council, to support the energy efficiency.
Support occupants to better reduce, reuse and recycle	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council, to support occupants to better reduce, reuse recycle.
Support the protection, expansion and enhancement of Dorset's ecological network (e.g. through encouraging more wildlife-friendly gardens) or wider use of nature-based solutions for existing communities (e.g. SuDS)	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council, to support nature-based solutions.
Ensure old site has a site waste management plan	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council regarding waste management.
Transport	
Enable buildings to have easy, safe and affordable access to active and public transport options	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council regarding active and public transport.
Support the provision of EV charging facilities	Dorset Council will not own the asset; however, there are opportunities to provide advice to Charmouth Parish Council regarding EV charging installation.
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	

No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	

9. Well-being and health implications

The proposal will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the local community by supporting community resilience to coastal change and securing the long-term future of the CHCC as a valued community and educational asset. It will also help sustain the local tourism economy by safeguarding an important visitor attraction that supports local businesses and employment within Charmouth and the wider Jurassic Coast area.

10. Other implications

None identified.

11. Risk implications

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

There is potential for the funding of this facility to be considered by other local communities to be unfair to those other local communities, who may consider that they would equally benefit from such an acquisition, especially in light of the fact that the Parish Council intend to relocate their offices to the site in order to reduce their

overheads and accordingly make the running of this building more affordable for them. However, the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme carried out careful analysis and concluded that Charmouth was a community that was particularly at risk of the adverse impact of coastal erosion and it can be clearly demonstrated that this acquisition will merely replace an asset that would otherwise become unusable due to coastal erosion and accordingly, the acquisition is justified by the circumstances.

13. Appendices

- Appendix A: Exempt – by virtue of paragraph 3 of scheduled 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
- Appendix B: Dorset Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme Outline Business Case
- Appendix C: Future Coast Charmouth - Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix D: Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme OBC Cabinet Paper (2024)

14. Background papers

Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme Outline Business Case Cabinet Paper
(See Appendix D)

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 Assurance and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)