Cabinet
10 November 2026
Chesil Cove Seawall Improvement Scheme
For Decision

Cabinet Member:
Cllr J Jeanes, Place Services

Local Councillor(s): Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Paul Kimber, Cllr Pete Roper

Senior Leadership Team:
J Britton - Executive Director, Economy & Environment

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Statutory Authority: Coast Protection Authority

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

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report seeks approval of the Outline Business Case for the Chesil Cove Seawall Improvements Scheme and a Dorset Council capital contribution of £3.14 million towards its delivery. The Council contribution represents approximately 30% of the capital funding requirement and is expected to attract £7.34 million of external Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Grant in Aid (70%).

This investment will help protect Portland's community, homes, economy and future prosperity. The scheme will reduce the risk to approximately 51 residential properties, commercial premises, utility infrastructure, public rights of way, beach huts and community facilities. It will also help protect the A354, Portland's only highway connection to the mainland and an essential route for approximately 13,000 residents, businesses, visitors, emergency services and HMP The Verne. It forms a key part of the council's strategic approach to climate adaptation and community resilience as articulated in its council plan and Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology strategy.

Maintaining a resilient connection to Portland will support access to employment, education, healthcare and essential services. It will also provide greater confidence for existing businesses and future investment, including cultural, visitor and

regeneration opportunities such as MEMO. The scheme will therefore help to sustain Portland as a place to live, work, visit and invest.

The existing seawall was constructed in 1965 to prevent erosion at the base of the West Weares landslide system. Investigations undertaken through the Outline Business Case have identified deterioration and an increasing risk of failure. Without intervention, failure of the seawall could lead to renewed erosion and potentially reactivate the landslide, affecting property, infrastructure and the A354.

The recommended scheme will strengthen and protect the existing seawall, maintaining the current coastal defence and supporting the stability of the West Weares landslide system over the 100-year appraisal period.

The total estimated scheme cost is approximately £10.96 million, including £380,000 of Dorset Council revenue funding and £100,000 Local Levy spent to date. The proposed £3.14 million capital contribution provides a strong local commitment and is considered likely to support a successful application for £7.34 million of external funding. While external funding cannot be guaranteed until the Environment Agency completes its assurance and approval process, the risk of the application being unsuccessful is reduced because the scheme has a strong economic case, meets national coastal risk management objectives and includes a substantial local contribution.

The scheme is expected to deliver approximately £42.9 million of economic benefits and currently has a benefit cost ratio of approximately 3.9. It supports all four priorities of the Dorset Council Plan 2024-2029 by protecting homes, supporting resilient communities and economic investment, and adapting critical infrastructure to the effects of climate change.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approves the Outline Business Case for the Chesil Cove Seawall Improvements Scheme.
2. Approves the full value of the project and Dorset Council's capital contribution of up to £3.14 million towards delivery of the scheme and inclusion of the scheme within Dorset Council's Capital Programme, as detailed in section 7.
3. Authorises progression of the scheme through to construction delivery including detailed design, procurement, environmental assessment, planning, marine licensing and other statutory approval processes, subject to confirmation of the external funding and the scheme remaining within the approved overall budget.
4. Authorises submission of the Outline Business Case to the Environment Agency’s National Project Assurance Service and any relevant approval body.

5. Authorises the ongoing drawdown and acceptance of external Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Grant in Aid and any additional external contributions secured for the scheme.
6. Delegates authority to procure and award all works and associated professional services to the Executive Director for Economy and Environment, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Place Services, subject to the total expenditure remaining within the approved budget and compliance with the Council's procurement and financial regulations.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 The recommendations will enable Dorset Council to deliver a nationally significant coastal infrastructure resilience project which protects people, property, businesses, strategic transport infrastructure, economic activity, tourism and future investment, including opportunities such as MEMO, from the increasing risks associated with coastal erosion, landsliding and climate change.

3.2 The proposal is also expected to secure £7.34 million of external investment; deliver approximately £42.9 million of economic benefits; provide high value for money with a benefit cost ratio of approximately 3.9 and contribute directly to Dorset Council's strategic priorities relating to economic growth, resilient communities and climate adaptation, as well as other national strategic policies.

4. The report

4.1 Strategic Priority

The proposal supports the priorities within the Dorset Council Plan 2024-2029 including to Respond to the Climate and Nature Crisis, Communities for All and Grow our Economy. The scheme is a significant climate adaptation and infrastructure resilience investment which will help protect communities, businesses, public infrastructure, economic activity, tourism and investment from the increasing impacts of coastal erosion and climate change. The scheme also supports:

• The National FCERM Strategy for England (2020).

• Durlston Head to Rame Head Shoreline Management Plan: delivering the Hold the Line policy applying to the Chiswell to Chesil Beach policy unit.

• Dorset Council's climate adaptation as articulated in its council plan and the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology strategy, and infrastructure resilience objectives.

• Portland Underhill to Wyke Regis Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy (Draft 2027).

4.2 Background

The existing seawall at Chesil Cove was constructed in 1965 to prevent coastal erosion at the toe of the West Weares landslide system. The seawall provides a critical function in maintaining slope stability and protecting the community and infrastructure located above and adjacent to the landslide system.

Recent inspections, coastal process studies and geotechnical investigations have identified signs of deterioration, structural movement, beach lowering and foundation exposure. The OBC highlights that the southern section of the seawall is particularly vulnerable and may fail during a future significant storm event if major improvement works are not undertaken.

Failure of the structure would permit renewed marine erosion and could trigger widespread reactivation of the landslide system. Under the Do-Nothing scenario, approximately 51 residential properties, commercial assets, public rights of way, beach huts and community infrastructure could be affected. Significant disruption to the A354 could result in the loss of Portland's only road connection to the mainland.

The OBC considered a broad range of options and identified a preferred option involving structural strengthening of the seawall, installation of new sheet piles and construction of a protective rock revetment. This option was determined to offer the most effective balance of technical performance, environmental considerations, affordability and value for money.

4.3 Economic case and Scheme Benefits

The economic appraisal has been undertaken over a 100-year appraisal period in accordance with Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management appraisal guidance.

The recommended option (5A) has estimated whole-life economic benefits of approximately £42.9 million and a benefit cost ratio of approximately 3.9. The scheme is therefore assessed as providing high value for money.

The recommended scheme will:

- provide greater resilience and confidence for local businesses, tourism and future investment;
- support the infrastructure conditions needed for major economic and cultural opportunities on Portland, including MEMO;
- safeguard commercial assets, utility infrastructure, public rights of way, beach huts and community facilities;

- help protect approximately 51 homes, supporting housing security and community confidence;
- help protect the A354 and maintain Portland's only highway connection to the mainland;
- support continued access to employment, education, healthcare, emergency services and essential facilities for approximately 13,000 residents;
- reduce the risk of serious economic and community disruption following seawall or landslide failure;
- deliver approximately £42.9 million of whole-life economic benefits; and
- improve resilience to climate change over the 100-year appraisal period.

4.4 Delivery and programme

Subject to Cabinet and Environment Agency approval, the project will progress through several stages including detailed design and additional surveys; Habitats Regulations Assessment and other environmental approvals; planning and marine licence applications; Coast Protection Act 1949 processes; early contractor involvement and buildability review; and construction and commissioning.

The current programme anticipates pre-construction activities commencing in 2027, with statutory approvals and procurement continuing into 2028. Construction is currently expected to take place principally during 2028-2029.

The programme will remain subject to Cabinet and Environment Agency approval, confirmation of the funding package, planning and marine licensing timescales, any public inquiry required under the Coast Protection Act, environmental working restrictions, availability of suitable materials, contractor availability, tidal and sea-state constraints and the condition of the existing seawall.

4.5 Engagement

Three rounds of community engagement have been undertaken during preparation of the OBC, covering the condition of the seawall, the options considered and the emerging preferred option.

Some concern has been expressed regarding the effect of rock armour on beach amenity and access to the sea. These issues will continue to be considered during detailed design, including the shape of the revetment, the treatment of its northern termination and opportunities to retain appropriate access.

Engagement has also included Natural England, the Environment Agency, Dorset Council Planning Authority, Marine Management Organisation, Portland Town

Council, Crown Estate interests, local businesses and relevant environmental and World Heritage Site stakeholders.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 A range of options were considered through the OBC appraisal process, including:

- Do Nothing;
- Do Minimum maintenance;
- full seawall replacement;
- offshore structures;
- rock apron options; and
- seawall refurbishment and strengthening options.

The Do-Nothing option was rejected as it would result in continued deterioration and failure of the seawall. Alternative engineering solutions were discounted due to higher costs, poorer value for money, environmental impacts or technical constraints. The preferred option was selected following comprehensive technical, economic and environmental appraisal.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 Dorset Council is the Coast Protection Authority for the area under the Coast Protection Act 1949 and has powers to undertake works for the protection of land from coastal erosion.

6.2 Progression of the scheme will require procurement of professional services and construction contracts, together with planning permission, marine licensing approvals, environmental assessment and other statutory consents. Dorset Council Legal Services will be required to support the development and delivery of appropriate contractual, procurement, licencing and funding arrangements.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The total estimated cost of the scheme is approximately £10.96 million, including £380,000 of Dorset Council revenue funding and £100,000 Local Levy spent to date. Excluding the previous revenue and Local Levy expenditure, the proposed capital funding comprises:

- Environment Agency Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Grant in Aid: £7.34 million;

- Dorset Council capital contribution: up to £3.14 million.

The proposed Council contribution represents approximately 30% of the capital funding requirement and provides a strong local partnership contribution in support of the application for approximately £7.34 million of external funding. Approximately 70% of the capital requirement is therefore expected to be met through external funding.

The likelihood of securing the anticipated external contribution is considered to be good. This reflects the scheme's alignment with national coastal risk management objectives, its economic case, the risks being managed and the substantial local contribution proposed by Dorset Council. External funding cannot, however, be guaranteed until the Outline Business Case has completed the Environment Agency's assurance and approval process and the relevant funding agreements have been confirmed.

If the external contribution is materially lower than assumed, officers will consider whether the scheme or funding package can be revised. The scheme will not proceed to construction unless an affordable funding package has been confirmed. Any proposal requiring an increase in the approved Council contribution will be subject to further approval through the Council's financial and governance arrangements.

The scheme is expected to deliver approximately £42.9 million of economic benefits and currently has a benefit cost ratio of approximately 3.9. Excluding the Dorset Council revenue funding spent to date, the proposed total capital funding requirement for the scheme comprises:

Funding source	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**	**Total**
External Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding	£0.92m	£4.23m	£2.19m	£7.34m
Dorset Council capital contribution	£0.40m	£1.81m	£0.93m	£3.14m
Total funding	**£1.32m**	**£6.04m**	**£3.12m**	**£10.48m**

Table 1 proposed capital funding breakdown.

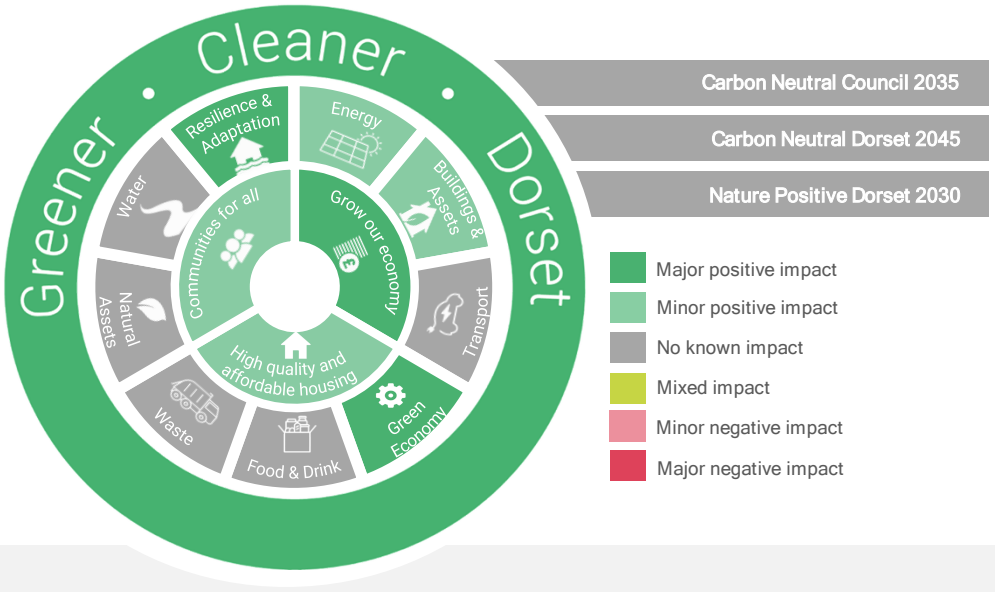
7.2 There is currently no proposed permanent increase in staffing arising from the scheme, however, approved funding may be used to fund a position if added resourcing is deemed necessary. The project will be governed through regular cost reporting, change control, risk management and monitoring of expenditure against the approved budget. Any material cost increase that cannot be managed within the

approved budget will be reported through the Council's financial governance arrangements.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 The scheme is an important climate adaptation project which will improve local resilience to sea-level rise, increasing storm severity and coastal erosion. The locality is vulnerable to sea level rise due to climate change, including a 'high' (>3.3%) chance of flooding mid-century as a result. The project therefore strongly supports Dorset Council Plan's strategic priority of responding to the climate and nature crisis by protecting vulnerable communities and critical infrastructure from environmental change.

8.2. The project is located within and adjacent to nationally and internationally important environmental designations including the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, Special Areas of Conservation and a Marine Conservation Zone. Environmental considerations have informed development of the preferred option and further Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and statutory approval processes will be undertaken during the next stage of project development.



Quantitative Impact on CEE targets (if known)		
	Unit	Number of units (+/-)
2030 - Natural asset extent & condition	Ha	Unknown
2040 - Operational Emissions	CO_2 (tonnes)	Unknown
2050 - County Emissions	CO_2 (tonnes)	Unknown

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 The scheme will provide positive wellbeing benefits by reducing risks associated with coastal erosion and landslide hazards. Continued protection of homes, community infrastructure, public footpaths and transport links will support community confidence, resilience and long-term wellbeing.

The proposal will also help maintain access to employment, education, recreation and essential services for residents, businesses and visitors.

10. Other implications

10.1 N/A

11. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Low.

12. Equalities

12.1 Following a screening process, no adverse effects have been identified.

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix A – Outline Business Case

13.2 Appendix B – Equality impact assessment screening

13.3 Appendix C – List of acronyms used

14. Background papers

14.1 None

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 & Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Cabinet Member(s).