

## Community wins £1/4m bid to prepare for coastal changes

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has granted £245,000 to support the communities that will be affected by the eventual closure of the Slapton Line.

The grant comes as welcome news to the Slapton Line Partnership (SLP), which placed the bid for the community funding last July. Specifically the Defra cash boost is for a 3-year SLP project, through which local businesses and residents will be able to prepare for coastal changes.

Results of the Slapton Coastal Zone Management study last year concluded that a permanent road breach was increasingly likely after 50 years. Since the most recent breach of the road in 2001, around £1m has been invested in the area and the Slapton Line Partnership has committed to maintaining the road for as long as possible. However the risk remains of a permanent breach happening some time in the next 20 – 50 years.

Chairman of the Slapton Line Partnership, Ruth Bagley, said: *“Neither the local community around the Slapton Line nor the Slapton Line Partnership can afford to be complacent. We all need to respond to the threat to the road and it’s going to take many years to fully comprehend and develop the businesses and lives that will change as a result of the threat and the reality of the road loss.*

*“This Defra funding will enable the Slapton Line Partnership to work with the local community, with transport and service providers, the small businesses and tourism sector, land managers and so on, to complete an adaptation plan for when the permanent breach occurs, so we can all work and live facing the future with confidence”.*

The £245,000 project to prepare for the coastal changes at Slapton is one of six national pilot schemes funded by Defra to look at new ways of tackling the challenges of flooding and erosion. Part of the funding is being used to support a project manager to lead the planning process and co-ordinate work between the community and the SLP. It’s hoped the project manager will be recruited shortly.

Other Defra-funded pilot projects will consider the contribution farmland can make in reducing flood risk as well as how communities can better understand and adapt to the pressures of coastal erosion.

Announcing the six pilots, Minister for Climate Change and Environment Ian Pearson said: *“We can’t hide from the consequences of climate change. When we consider the possibility of higher sea levels and storms of greater intensity we have to start thinking differently about how to deal with flooding and coastal erosion - this means adapting to the consequences now and developing greater resilience.”*





# Your views required on major action plan

The Partnership is seeking feedback and comments on a community action plan aimed at preparing for future coastal changes at Slapton.

Known as the **Adaptation Plan**, it was first unveiled last January and sets out the actions needed in preparation for any breach of the A379 along the Slapton Line that is so major that it cannot be reinstated.

The principal items covered in the plan are communications, transport and highways, access to communities, local sustainable development, access to facilities

and ensuring public awareness of policies.

The plan is a working document that is expected to evolve through time.

It was first discussed at a meeting of all the communities and organisations affected by any future road closure which was held at Stokenham Village Hall last January.

Since then it has been the subject of a review and consultation process and an updated version was presented to a meeting of the Slapton Line Advisory Forum on October 5.

Full details of the Adaptation Plan can be found on the website

[www.slaptonlinepartnership.co.uk](http://www.slaptonlinepartnership.co.uk)

## Departing Chairman

Ruth Bagley, Chief Executive of South Hams District Council and Chairman of the Slapton Line Partnership (SLP) announced she would be leaving her posts at the end of May to take up her new role as Chief Executive at Slough Unitary Council.

On her announcement, Ruth Bagley said: *"I've held the role of Chairman of the Slapton Line Partnership since its inception in 2001. Thanks to the involvement of all interested parties including residents, I believe that in 2007 we are all more prepared for a breach of the Slapton Coast road should it occur in the future."*

*"There is also now a strong focus on supporting the community through the changes that will be required when the road is lost. My thanks to all those concerned for their input and support."*

At the April meeting of the SLP Technical Group, an interim Chairman from the group was agreed until a permanent replacement could be found.

## ROAD WILL CLOSE – ONE DAY

The Slapton Line Partnership has made it clear that its policy will be to keep the A379 open for as long as that is practical.

But its policy statement is also clear that while it's unlikely to happen for 30 to 50 years, one day the road will have to be abandoned.

This policy was reached after studies in to a wide range of options examined the environmental, social and economic implications of the potential route loss.

The statement points out that the road is going to become increasingly vulnerable to wave erosion with rising sea levels and more storm events predicted.

And it adds: *"The policy is to maintain the continuity of the main road link by repairing erosion and moving sections of the road very slightly inland for as long as this is practicable, but on the clear understanding that the road will have to be abandoned."*

*"The timing of the closure of the road link is uncertain, and depends on natural processes and the speed of erosion."*

*"In the meantime, the Slapton Line Partnership is working with local communities to develop and implement an adaptation plan in preparation for the eventual loss of the road."*

# Permission granted for quick response to breach

Planning permission has been granted for Devon County Council to realign the most vulnerable stretches of the Slapton coast road when the route is damaged suddenly, or damages are imminent.

For users of the Slapton Line, it means that if significant erosion were to occur at one of the vulnerable points, the road could be re-opened for use again within weeks; more quickly than at the time of the 2001 breach.

The vulnerable sections of the route between the Slapton road junction and Strete Gate were identified in Slapton Coastal Zone Management study as at greatest risk from further erosion.

Chairman of Slapton Line Partnership, Ruth Bagley said: *"Of course this is by no means a permanent solution to the threat of the road loss, but it will help us to maintain the route for as long as possible."*

The move is based on information from the detailed Environment Impact Assessment which was carried out as part of the planning application needed before work could begin on re-building the lost section of the road back in 2002.

The county council worked out detailed arrangements with the Slapton Ley Field Centre, The Whitley Wildlife Trust and Natural England over advanced clearance work along any future line of the road alignment.



As part of the agreement some of the scrub clearance work has already been carried out and more work has been done by the Field Studies Centre over the winter.

The Slapton Line Partnership is pursuing a policy of road realignment and shingle recycling to maintain the Slapton Line until a permanent breach occurs. Meanwhile it's moving with the community to develop an Adaptation Plan part-funded by Defra.

## Alternative routes are being developed

In anticipation of a breach of the Slapton Line, Devon County Council is liaising with the Coleridge group of parishes on how best to use minor roads for alternative routes.

Once agreed, the County will ensure the contingency route is effectively signposted, and from 2008 aims to create one additional passing place each year where possible.

The present basic proposal is to allow vehicles to travel northwards on one set of minor roads from Carehouse Cross through Coles Cross, Wallaton Cross and Forder, joining the Strete to Blackawton Road at Cornish Post. Vehicles travelling southwards would travel through Gara Bridge and Slapton, through to Stokenham and join

the A379 at Carehouse Cross. In this way, the only common section would be a short length near Carehouse Cross.

However Devon County Council is aware that compulsory one-way routes would cause long detours for some local residents, so while the local community would be encouraged to keep to the one-way routes as much as possible, the one-way route would not be compulsory.

Both northward and southward routes contain some very narrow sections that are really only suitable for light traffic such as private cars and light commercial vehicles.

The suggestion is that to help traffic flow, these routes would be known amongst local residents and could

be made available on the Slapton Line Partnership website but that no additional signs are erected at the beginnings or ends of the routes that might encourage non local traffic. Instead at the ends of the routes, advisory signs would be erected showing the restrictions to vehicles to deter a significant number of non-local users from using the route.

Views are welcome on the matter and residents should share their thoughts directly with their parish council, who will channel their views through the Coleridge group.

Once a clear consensus has been agreed this year, Devon County Council aims to progress agreed signing soon after. Passing Bays would follow one each year as budgets permitted.

# Aerial survey in coastal monitoring work

Routine survey work of the Slapton Line will include a bird's eye view of the way the beach is changing.

Aerial photographs of the beach will be included in the work that is being done as part of a five year programme of monitoring which is being carried out along the South West coast.

The work will also involve the use of Lidar (Light Detecting and Ranging) data which involves measuring beaches using sophisticated aerial technology to produce a photographic record of beach levels along the Line.

A team of field experts will also be in action on the ground measuring up to 30 beach cross sections between Strete Gate and Torcross as part of the monitoring programme which will be carried out by the Dorset and South Devon Coastal Group.

Routine surveys will take place twice a year and will be supplemented by extra inspections carried out by South Hams District Council engineers in the wake of any specific storm events.

The aim is to increase the baseline data available and to improve knowledge of sediment movement along the beach.

The survey work is being carried out as part of a wider review of the Shoreline Management Plan for the Dorset and South Devon Coasts. This review started in the autumn and is programmed to last for two years.

# What it will take to lose the road

The Slapton Line Partnership is committed to keeping the A379 coastal road open as long as it is practical.

But it has now spelled out just what it will take to force a recommendation for the road to be abandoned.

This would occur if there was:

- A total breach of the shingle embankment.
- The loss of the shingle ridge protecting the embankment which supports the road.
- The loss of part of the width of the road over a significant length.

The statement is in response to a number of requests for information about how much damage the A379 road route could sustain before it is decided to close it.

But the Partnership has made it clear that a whole range of factors will have to be considered before any decision is made whether or not to repair storm damage to the road between Torcross and Strete Gate.

They include:

- The likelihood of a recurrence of the conditions that cause significant damage to the road.
- The financial cost of road repairs and the availability of funding to carry it out.

- The extent of the damage to the road surface and the supporting embankment.
- The environmental considerations.
- What stage the Adaptation Plan – a form of “exit” strategy if the road eventually has to go – has reached.

Meanwhile Devon County Council, as the highways authority, is pushing forward with a number of recommendations arising from the main study report designed to sustain the future of the road for as long as possible.

They include the possible future realignment of the A379 at both ends of the new section and working with the community to sign alternative routes for local use to prepare for future breaches of the A379.

The District Council is active in arranging the localised movement of shingle to provide temporary protection to the most vulnerable sections of the beach and supports the beach monitoring work.

Both Authorities are maintaining the role of the Partnership and supporting the Adaptation Plan designed to address the wider community issues in anticipation of the time in the future when the retention of the road is no longer sustainable.

