

| <b>Environmental Services and Climate Change Meeting</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| <b>Meeting Date</b>                                      | 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Report Title</b>                                      | Coastal Communities Engagement Planning Update                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>EMT Lead</b>                                          | Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Head of Service</b>                                   | Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment & Leisure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>                                      | Mike Knowles, Seafront & Engineering Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Classification</b>                                    | <b>Open</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Members are asked to discuss the contents of the report and agree the principles of the Community Engagement Plan and agree which engagement approach they would want to undertake – passive, midway or active;</li> <li>2. If midway or active approach is agreed, recommend that one-off funding is made available for the required resources to deliver the plan, as detailed in paragraph 2.11 and 2.12 of the report.</li> </ol> |

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an update following the previous report to Members in March 2025, and the subsequent recommendation for officers to focus on engaging with and supporting residents affected by coastal erosion.

## **2 Background, Context and Proposals**

- 2.1 Following the recommendation from the March 2025 Environment and Climate Change Committee meeting, officers have been working with a company called Icarus, a consultant commissioned by the Environment Agency (EA) to support the National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping (NCERM) Project, on a Coastal Erosion Engagement Plan.
- 2.2 Through discussions with colleagues in the East Kent Engineering Partnership, funding was secured through the Environment Agency project for Icarus to work with Swale officers from several departments, as well as staff from the Environment Agency, to develop a comprehensive Engagement Plan for those residents affected by future coastal erosion on the undefended North Sheppey coast.

- 2.3 The Borough Council provided some funding from our coastal maintenance budget to complete this piece of work, which included a number of online workshops and two face-to-face workshops to share ideas and develop the plan.
- 2.4 The in-person sessions, which included several key stakeholders and a range of departments across the Council, proved to be very positive, and enabled attendees to share ideas and experiences, and discuss and develop a comprehensive engagement plan.
- 2.5 The draft plan is designed to provide a starting point for further planning and will require constant reviewing and updating throughout the process.
- 2.6 Following the substantial amount of work that has taken place with colleagues and other key stakeholders, it is proposed to adopt the Engagement Plan and use this as a basis for future engagement with communities affected by coastal erosion.
- 2.7 Through discussions with key stakeholders, as well as other coastal authorities such as North Norfolk District Council who are already actively engaging with communities in their area, it is apparent that there are a number of important considerations that need to be addressed as part of the engagement planning.
- 2.8 Once active engagement commences, it is important that regular communication takes place with residents, even if some of the messages do not provide particular updates. The Coastal Engineering Team at North Norfolk District Council have stressed the importance of adequate resource, not only to commence the engagement process but to maintain effective engagement and communication into the future. The message from stakeholders is that poor engagement is worse than no engagement.
- 2.9 There are three potential tiers of engagement which could be considered for the community engagement. These are detailed below, together with anticipated costs for each option:-
- 2.10 Passive Approach – this would consist of providing general information around coastal erosion on Swale’s website, including a link to the SMP Explorer website held on gov.uk, and encouraging residents to check the risk of erosion for their individual properties and to consider their future options. The cost of this approach would be zero as the compilation of this information could be covered with existing resources.
- 2.11 Midway Approach – this option would include adding more detailed information on Swale’s website through the use of an engagement consultant and marketing company. As well as providing links to the SMP Explorer website, there could also be a “contact us” link for specific property enquiries. The anticipated cost of this approach is expected to be £20,000.

- 2.12 Active Engagement Approach – this would follow the draft Community Engagement Plan, and would require funding for a full time Engagement Officer, initially on an 18 month fixed term contract, with possible casual staff and venue rental costs for drop in coffee morning events for residents to attend and discuss coastal erosion issues and options. The anticipated cost of this approach is expected to be £80,000.
- 2.13 The role of the Coastal Engagement Officer will need to be a strong communicator and be able to coordinate project plans. It will be key in ensuring each of the key Council departments (communications, housing, seafront engineering, planning, community engagement) provide the right technical input. Key to the success of this project will be the inclusion of Parish Councils and Ward Members in the affected areas.
- 2.14 As part of the engagement planning workshops, officers have been liaising with staff at the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) who are undertaking a three-year National Lottery Heritage funded project, called Coasts in Mind, to bring together community groups and other partners to explore the impact of coastal change in their area, and share their memories. It will be beneficial to work closely with MOLA to coordinate engagement activities through this project and explore any potential funding opportunities.

### **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 Members are asked to discuss the contents of the report and agree the principles of the Community Engagement Plan and agree which engagement approach they would want to undertake – passive, midway or active;
- 3.2 If midway or active approach is agreed, recommend that one-off funding is made available for the required resources to deliver the plan, as detailed in paragraph 2.11 and 2.12 of the report.

### **4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

- 4.1 The alternative option to undertaking engagement with affected communities would be for the Council to do nothing. This is not recommended as this would not support communities at risk of coastal erosion or give them guidance to prepare for the future, potentially resulting in similar emergency responses to that experienced from the cliff collapse and property loss in May 2020.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 As previously discussed in the report to Committee in March 2025, whilst we have had engagement with a number of the residents in the immediate location of the

previous cliff fall and the local Parish Council, there has not been widespread public consultation to date. With the sensitive and complex nature of this issue, it is imperative that a clear communication and engagement plan is in place, with suitable resource, prior to any future engagement.

## 6 Implications

| Issue                            | Implications                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| Corporate Plan                   | Environment - To provide a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable and enjoyable environment, and to prepare our borough for the challenges ahead                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Financial, Resource and Property | <p>For the three engagement options, costs are expected to be zero for a passive approach, £20,000 for a midway approach and £80,000 for an active approach. Without effective engagement with residents, the continued coastal erosion is expected to result in future emergency responses to individual erosion events. The cost to the authority for the emergency response following the Eastchurch Cliffs event in May 2020 was around £25,000, excluding the costs of temporary and alternative long-term accommodation for those residents affected, which was a considerable sum.</p> <p>To undertake active engagement with affected communities, suitable resource, both short term and longer term, will be essential to ensure the effectiveness of the engagement. Lack of resource will result in poor engagement, which will negatively impact on the reputation of the local authority. The engagement process is likely to generate a large volume of communication, and it is proposed to have a coordinator post at grade 7, initially for 12 months at a cost of £74,511 plus a small working budget of £5,000. For specific events, such as drop-in sessions, the resource requirement will be higher to accommodate 1-2-1 discussions with attendees but it is expected that this will be provided by the department specialists in each field. There will also be the requirement to secure a regular location for the drop-in sessions.</p> <p>National funding still remains unclear about support for these affected properties. We are awaiting further information from the Environment Agency as detailed in the March 2025 committee report.</p> |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement | The Housing Act 2004 Part 1 requires the Council to take enforcement action where homes are not safe. This can take the form of hazard awareness notices or prohibition notices or demolition order.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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|                                                              | <p>Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 provides the statutory responsibility to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people, threatened with or actually homeless.</p> <p>The Civil Contingences Act places duties on the Council as a Part 1 responsible authority. This places a duty on us to assess risks and make ensure appropriate plans are in place as well as responding during an emergency.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Crime and Disorder                                           | None identified                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency                 | Engagement with communities affected by coastal erosion is essential to ensure that householders are aware of the present and future risks and can plan for the future. Successful engagement and planning will allow properties to be demolished and cleared as they reach end of life, rather than being left to the natural erosion processes and ending up depositing large quantities of debris down the cliff and along the coastline.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Health and Wellbeing                                         | The ongoing natural coastal erosion process will continue to impact on communities close to the unprotected coastline, and engagement with these communities to promote adaptation is essential. Clear and consistent messaging around predicted future erosion and the impacted properties will be paramount in achieving this engagement and promoting coastal adaptation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | Some of the residents currently planning to remain in their properties until the natural erosion forces them to leave are classed as vulnerable, and it is imperative that clear and consistent regular conversations are maintained with these residents to ensure they are fully aware of the risks and their needs met.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety                        | <p>The main risk associated with the Engagement Plan is the reputation of the Council through poor engagement, or a lack of long-term commitment to continue this engagement into the future. Despite the March 2025 committee report and the Environment Agency's release of updated erosion rates, this may be the first time that the community become aware of the future risks. Without community engagement, property owners could be unaware of the risks associated with coastal erosion, resulting in a lack of future planning, and potential emergency events to deal with erosion incidents affecting properties.</p> <p>Without future planning and the demolition and removal of properties at imminent risk of collapse, there is the potential for an increase in the volume of materials, some of which could include asbestos, being washed up on our bathing beaches resulting in an</p> |

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|                                 | increased requirement for handpicking of this material by specialist contractors. |
| Equality and Diversity          | None identified at this stage.                                                    |
| Privacy and Data Protection     | None identified at this stage.                                                    |
| Local Government Reorganisation | None identified at this stage.                                                    |

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Draft Engagement Plan Summary

## 8 Background Papers

8.1 Link to “Update on Motion to Change Shoreline Management Plan Policy – Eastchurch Cliffs” report (Agenda Item 6) – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025: [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Environment and Climate Change Committee, 18/03/2025 19:00](#)