

Amendment to 2018 Report 'Managing the Coast in a Changing Climate'

A revised version of Box 1.1, updated in January 2021, is provided below to include additional information on the A379 Slapton Road case study, with further detail provided by the Slapton Line Partnership.

Box 1.1. A379 Slapton Road - a case study

The A379 is a coastal road in Devon that runs through a National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest. The road includes a 3km section that was built on a gravel barrier beach. Barrier beaches are well-known as dynamic features and respond to storm events and sea level rise in relatively predictable ways i.e. by rolling over on themselves and moving landward. This process has the potential to damage any structures that are built on top of them.

In March 2018, Storm Emma washed away around 400m of the 1.5km stretch of the A379 between Slapton and Strete Gate. The required diversion added around 7km to the journey (25km for HGVs). The road had suffered similar damage in January 2001 when 250m of the road was damaged after a storm.

That section of road was re-built 20m further inland to avoid further, short-term storm damage. Later, in 2007, planning permission was sought, and granted, to rebuild further sections of the A379 around 20m further inland in the event of further damage. Days after the road failure, using the existing technical analyses and plans for road retreat, £2.5M was secured from the Department for Transport. In May, considering the detail, Devon County Council rejected alternative ideas, including closing the road, and agreed to extend the planning permission of 2007 so that a section of road could be re-built around 15m inland thus creating an erosion buffer.

The Slapton Line Partnership, set up in 2001 to bring together statutory bodies and the local community in order to determine the future of the road, has always presented the option of retreating the road as having a limited future. The road will ultimately fail and an adaptation process to mitigate and enable change to the loss of the road will then be required. Some will question the wisdom of the investment in retreating the road, but some of the funds have been used for repairs to defences and improving inland routes; beginning this gradual adaptation process.

Even when significant resources have been invested in engaging the local community and developing a forward-looking, adaptive strategy, this case highlights the challenge of implementing plans that have taken long-term issues into account. But having clear plans in place, revisiting these regularly and having the support of a group of stakeholders engaged in the solution makes it easier to respond to critical events.



Source: Photograph included with kind permission from Ian Coomber (2018).

Notes: Slapton Sands Beach Management Plan (2018) available at <http://www.slaptonline.org/news/news.php?id=145>; news stories from: <https://www.devonlive.com>; Devon County Council: <https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/traffic-information/roadworks/a379-slapton-line-realignment/> and communication with other local stakeholders.