

Community adaptation: the Slapton Line Partnership



Photo: Torcross village and the Slapton Line

Overview

The shingle bank known as the Slapton Line is a unique natural coastal feature in South Devon, separating the beach of Slapton Sands from Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve – which includes the largest freshwater lake in the Westcountry. The Slapton Line is of enormous social and environmental importance including a Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve. The natural beauty and wildlife of the area attracts a number of visitors, making tourism a key part of the local economy.

Experts believe that due to a number of factors, including coastal erosion and increasingly frequent storms caused by climate change, the road that runs along the line can only be maintained for a maximum of 30 – 50 years and possibly less if storms become more violent. This has important consequences for the community, as this road links the community to the rest of the coastal stretch between Dartmouth and Torcross and is used by residents, visitors and delivery vans for businesses. In the future larger vans might need to reroute, which could increase the delivery costs for businesses - in the past there has been a drop in trade when the road has closed.

While residents and business around the Slapton Line learn to live with the changing coast, the Slapton Line Partnership aims to support them, by both maintaining the road for as long as possible and supporting the community as it adapts to the long term loss of the road.

In the winter of 2000/2001 a series of storms caused the loss of up to 5m of shingle beachhead over a 1000m length, highlighting the impact of such events on the community. A 200m section of the main road running along the ridge was undermined by the sea and had to be closed and a new section was built about 20m inland. An independent study concluded that road realignment was the best option, which would protect the area's special environmental qualities rather than compromising them with heavy engineering works. It was also the most likely to get funded. However, even with planned road realignment and protective shingle movement, the road is only predicted to last for around 30 years, depending on erosion rates.

A thorough consultation by the Slapton Line Partnership with local residents and businesses built and continues to develop an adaptation plan, called *Living with a Changing Coast*. Since then research has been conducted which found an encouraging level of awareness about the road and its uncertain future. A survey amongst local residents and businesses in November 2007 revealed that 83% of respondents were supportive or very supportive of the plan to tackle the threat of coastal erosion.

Climate change adaptation measures

- Agreement has been reached to invest up to £20,000 on rebuilding the shingle bastions along the beach that had been eroded by the sea since they were built in 2001. This will help to prolong the life of the road, although will not be a long term solution.
- Pre-emptive permission has been achieved for moving sections of the road inland.
- Signage for alternative routes has been agreed with the local community, to help both residents and visitors maintain access in the event of road closures. The parish councils surrounding the coast road, in partnership as the Coleridge Association, worked together with the Slapton Line Partnership for more than twelve months to agree the best route in January 2009. A programme of systematic road improvements along the route has been started.
- Given that the road is expected to be closed from time to time the Slapton Line Partnership is encouraging everyone to check out their alternative routes to school, work, and for leisure activities.
- A contingency plan for road closures has been developed and tested.
- A business forum has been established to look at the needs of local enterprises.
- Businesses were taken through marketing planning and focused on the challenge of the future road closure. SWOT analysis of this challenge revealed that 'opportunities' had more items on the list than 'challenges'. These opportunities have been brought together in a sustainable tourism strategy that seeks to make more of the area's natural assets.
- The Business forum are working on a number of matters, including plans for businesses to join up on distribution to lower costs and developing new business lines that could bring extra profit in the changing market.

Communications:

- New visitor displays along Slapton Line will help visitors appreciate its unique nature, thereby helping to promote the area despite the challenges that are faced.
- An annual 'Celebrate Start Bay' day is held – the first took place on 16th August 2008.
- Consultation was undertaken with local businesses and residents and a new newsletter has now been launched to help communicate the issues and responses.

Benefits

The vision for the Slapton Line is that:

- It becomes well-known regionally, nationally and internationally as a unique natural environment, including the National Nature Reserve
- It continues to be an attractive environment for locals and visitors
- The community and businesses supported by the partnership adapt to the change and make the most of the new situation



Photos: View of the Slapton Line and launch of Celebrate Start Bay (courtesy of Slapton Line Partnership)

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