West Itchenor Sea Wall

Update from the WIPC Sea Wall Working Group

November 2025



Map produced in March 1839 by J. Butler, a surveyor.

Update

From the WIPC Sea Wall Working Group

- At the West Itchenor Parish Council (WIPC) public meeting held in the Itchenor Memorial Hall on Friday 7th May 2025 we described in outline our programme to try and repair and future proof the West Itchenor Sea Wall, following the overtopping that occurred on 9th April 2024.
- The Sea Wall protects critical village infrastructure, as well as property. If the Sea Wall was breached the village would be inaccessible at high tide, and infrastructure, including sewer pipes and inspection chambers, electrical cabling, and telecommunication equipment would all fail.
- Since the 7th May meeting, the WIPC Sea Wall Working Group has moved forward according to a structured programme aimed at defining and obtaining approval for maintenance and improvements to the Sea Wall.

We have:

- Commissioned and obtained a levels survey of land, buildings and infrastructure that would flood if the sea wall was breached, or would be impacted by rising sea levels over the next 50-100 years.
- Held meetings with the Itchenor Sailing Club (ISC) and the Chichester Harbour Conservancy (CHC) about the design and extent of the Sea Wall.
- Agreed with CHC an extension to the scope of our consultant's study to include the foreshore west of ISC to and including Northshore, with significant additional funding coming from CHC.
- Consulted with several residents and organisations.

- We have also studied other sea wall defences, such as that which was constructed some years ago at Snow Hill Creek, and how this was financed – jointly, first by private subscription, and then gaining a grant from the Woodger Trust, and finally investment from the Environment Agency. Although there are differences between the projects, the relatively short time that it has taken the natural landscape to become fully re-established is also a helpful factor in our consideration of options for West Itchenor's sea wall.

- Following a formal tender process, WIPC appointed consulting civil engineers, Royal Haskoning, a highly regarded firm with expertise in coastal defences and detailed knowledge of the Solent area. ISC also appointed Haskoning, which helped gain joined-up-thinking about the sea wall. Haskoning's first draft report, covering the eastern portion of the Itchenor harbour frontage, has been reviewed. Some additional data is being assimilated, and Haskoning are now working on the final report.

- We intend for the Haskoning Report to become the primary document within a Pre-planning Application (Pre-App) to Chichester District Council (CDC). Although other agencies are involved as well, all consultations and comments will be sought and coordinated by CDC. We anticipate that our Pre App will contain sufficient data to enable CDC to advise us on the policy for a Full Planning Application, which will then follow. We also expect other parallel planning applications, particularly one from Itchenor Sailing Club, who seek permission to protect their Listed Buildings from flooding, and upgrade facilities.

- The issues we are grappling with are being considered within a much wider context. The Government, in the National Planning Policy Framework, directs that all new residential and substantial extension projects should have a ground floor level at or above 4.7m Above Ordnance Datum Newlyn (AODN). This broadly aligns with the Environment Agency's predictions for the rise in sea level over the next 100 years, and so, if it is complied with, it would effectively give new homes a 100 year life. The 4.7m AODN minimum level for inhabited floors is also likely to be required by insurers and mortgage authorities when considering new permanent residential buildings.

- We think it makes sense to proceed with the improvement of the sea wall in stages. This is partly to control costs, and partly because we will be able to view with much greater certainty the predictions for the period from 2075-2125 as we get closer to those dates. Over the next 50 years at least, sea water levels will rise and storms will increase. Our old 16th century sea wall needs to be repaired and then raised by about a metre to cope with the predicted rise of sea levels. With our phased approach, we are focussed now on the construction of a simple, rugged, relatively low cost and low maintenance solution that will give us resilience and peace of mind for the next half century, but very importantly, is strong enough in itself so that it could become the foundation for a fabricated 'crest wall' to deal with a further rise in sea levels during the period from 2075 to 2125.

- It is imperative to maintain and if possible improve the ecology of the environment both on the seaward and landward sides of the sea wall. This requirement is clearly spelled out in a number of policy documents including the latest Chichester Harbour Conservancy Management Plan. We are encouraged by the opportunity on the seaward side for CHC to continue the experiments with dredged material to provide a higher level area for an expansion of marsh grass. On the land side, up against the existing sea wall, where the new sea wall construction will take place, there will be temporary disruption to the ecology during construction along a narrow strip of land. However, experience elsewhere, notably at Snow Hill, suggests that this will recover well within a decade, providing a green and diverse ecology, and an attractive landscape when viewed either from the sea or from the land.

- At this stage we are still considering options for the detailed design of the sea wall. Different parts of the wall probably have to be built in different ways. In some areas we are restricted to a very narrow zone, while in other areas a slightly wider wall may make more sense. At the ends of the wall we have to consider the interface with existing structures and in the middle we have to mesh the heightened sea wall with the existing concrete sluice gate construction.

- We are considering the logistics of the construction process. The sea wall area is difficult to access with standard construction machinery and for the

delivery of materials. Clearly the less material we need, the less impact and energy required for transport to and within the site. We are speaking with adjoining land owners about options for access to the sea wall. We are also thinking about the optimum programme for the work.

- Ensuring effective storm water run-off will be increasingly important, for as sea levels rise, it is both low and high tide levels which are increasing in height. Storms can add thousands of gallons of extra water run-off from nearby fields, roads and properties. It is very important that the storage capacity of the low lying area abutting the rife is maintained. Since low tide levels will be higher, the sluice gate will open for a shorter time, so it will take longer for the lake to empty. At some point it would seem likely that the sluice gate will have to be enlarged and/or raised.

- Work on repairs has begun. Discussion with the Environment Agency has resulted in the partial completion of repairs to the concrete pavers which form a protective layer to the seaward side of the wall. Further work has been agreed with EA including strengthening the landward side of the wall where required, and levelling the top of the wall where erosion to the footpath or settlement of the wall has occurred. The immediate aim is that the crest of the whole wall should be at the same level as the highest part.

- We are beginning to consider what might be the best commercial framework for this community project, which is being undertaken within the context of approved Government documents that generally support the idea of retaining the sea wall, in a policy called 'hold the line', but describe the sea wall in Itchenor as on private land and therefore not supporting the use of public funds. The commercial framework needs to:

  - Ensure that funds are ring-fenced for the maintenance and improvement of the sea wall and related infrastructure.

  - Be structured so that the project can receive contributions from residents, local businesses, other charities, and government agencies.

  - Allow contributors and the sea wall project to benefit from tax reliefs available to certain types of charity.

- Because most of the work will have to take place on private property we will need to enter into agreements with these property owners. We expect that this will be of mutual benefit because it will share the task of ensuring that the wall is fit for purpose with the whole community rather than placing the obligation on only a few individual land owners.

- Once we begin to receive positive feedback from CDC we will begin to prepare detailed designs and construction documents in support of the Full Planning Application and as required to obtain more accurate estimates for cost and programme. We will also begin the critical task of raising money from the community. A small amount may arise from a modest increase in the Parish Council Precept, but by far the majority of the first tranche of funding will have to come from contributions from individual property, business and utility owners. We are optimistic that with evidence of community support from local contributions, and a ring-fenced fund, we will then be able to attract a significant contribution from other established local charities. Once approvals are obtained and the resources to proceed with a project are clear, we are hopeful that the Environment Agency will also contribute, as has happened elsewhere on similar projects.

- How much will all this cost? We are somewhat away from being able to suggest a start date for construction, costs will continue to escalate with inflation, and there is detailed design and programming work to do, but we believe that we are looking at an overall project cost of about £3 million at today's prices. We appreciate that this is a significant sum for the community, and we are aware that we always need to consider ways to ensure the most economic and least impactful construction. But while £3 million is significant, it is very modest when seen as a percentage of the total value of our village infrastructure, properties, and businesses. Failure to carry out this project would put all of that at risk.