Meeting Record

Discussion held to review the West Itchenor Sea Wall which needs to be raised

Present:

AT: Andy Townsend – Environment Agency (EA)

JD: John Denman – FCRM Advisor, Partnership & Strategic Overview, W Sussex – EA

CMB: Chris Mead-Briggs – West Itchenor Parish Council (WIPC) –Sea Wall Working Party (SWWP)

CC: Chris Colbourne – WIPC –SWWP

Location: EA offices, Teville Gate House, Worthing, BN11 1UR

Date: 29 Sept 2026, 14:00

Referring to a prepared note and the introductory statement previously submitted to EA in emails from Peter Taylor, SWWP Chairman, CMB explained the history of the Sea Wall, and why it was so important that it was maintained and upgraded. He used a Map (Appendix to the Haskoning report) to show the impact of an over-topping and breach of the wall, pointing out the main buildings and the village layout including:

- The "Conservation Area", Grade 1 St. Nicholas Church and other Listed buildings (copy of map on page 23 of the Village Design Statement)
- Itchenor Park Farm (originally built by the Duke of Richmond)
- Northshore Shipyard (an historic yard, also the location of WW2 construction of Fairmile motor launches, and an active employment location today)
- Itchenor's history as a ship building centre, and the comparison with Bucklers Hard
- Hatching on the map showing in green and grey the areas which would be flooded by 3.0m and 3.5m AOD tides if the sea wall breached.
- Red lines show the sewer network (both gravity and pumped) which are routed through the lowest areas of the land currently protected by the sea wall
- 8 Red triangles showing foul drainage pumping stations, most of which are located well below the high tide line.

CMB described the history of the Wall from the early 1600's to the present day, noting its length of about 500 metres, and he referred to the various leaflets prepared by WIPC for distribution to Village residents and relevant bodies.

He referred to the statement that Claire Francis (EA) made at the WIPC village hall meeting in October 2017, and he described the severe overtopping of the wall on 8th/9th April 2024 and that further overtopping has occurred.

The Sea Wall has been damaged and has slumped, (prints of photos were given to EA showing the exterior pavers bulging out of plane towards the eastern end of the Wall)

CMB noted that the West Itchenor Parish Council formed the Sea Wall Working Group to study the Wall, Storm Water systems and prepare a strategy which would protect the Village in the future.

Analysis shows that if the Sea Wall is currently breached:

- 150 houses and 5 businesses will be inaccessible twice a day at average or above average high tides as the road will flood and utilities will fail, resulting in power cuts, communication breakdown, and raw sewage escaping into the freshwater area behind the Wall
- Neither Northshore Shipyard (with 55000 sq ft on 7 acres) nor Chichester Harbour Conservancy, both located to the northern part of the village, will be able to operate
- The Hard, which is the only point of vehicle access for emergency services to harbour vessels, will be inaccessible
- From the Map, it can be seen that the sewers will fail throughout the village because the northern part of the network is routed well below sea level, allowing salt water to permeate the network, at which point the overload will trigger safety systems that automatically shut down all the pumping stations located in the village, according to Southern Water employees.

CMB explained the advice from Royal Haskoning and others to secure an acceptable solution.

We need to raise the sea wall before it fails. Delay in maintenance that led to failure would result in damage that would take years to repair at a cost of say £30/£40 million and likely resulting in the abandonment of parts of the village while critical tasks were undertaken.

The impact will be especially challenging on the Conservation Area which extends from The Hard to beyond St Nicholas Church and on includes all the local Listed Buildings.

The Parish Council commissioned advice from the respected civil and marine consulting engineers, Royal Haskoning, and others and has secured a Pre-App approval from CDC, but WIPC is not able to take the project forward and apply for government funds on our own because it does not qualify as a Flood Risk Management Authority. Nor does it have sufficient human or capital resources to undertake such a task.

WIPC, and the village community are looking to the EA to carry out immediate essential repairs to the wall and then to raise the height as shown indicatively in the Pre-App submission.

The community is establishing a village charity to act as a focus to funds to deal with environmental projects.

AT responded as follows:

- AT confirmed that the EA would take the project forward and prepare the documents necessary to submit a funding bid in the next DEFRA funding round for consideration for government funding. However, no assurance could be given regarding when funding might be secured. Funding allocation is likely to be challenging in the short term and the project will need to compete with other priorities through the funding process. It is therefore important that the Parish Council and wider community recognise that funding

may not be secured at an early stage. Once funding has been successfully allocated, a programme of works would be developed, with timescales typical of sea defence projects of this nature.

- FCERM is a competitive national process where available funds are allocated based on a cost/benefit analysis of a range of proposals. Funds are limited, or where other projects appear to be in more urgent need of aid, it can be of assistance and indeed essential to find partner funding.
- All applications for funds will be evaluated based on the methodology outlined in the Treasury 'Green Book.'
- A phased approach is important for several reasons. It takes time to obtain funds for a substantial improvement project. During that assessment period, 'Grant–in–Aid (GRA) funds, that is 'Capital Maintenance' funds will be used to cover the cost of repairs. This part of the regional EA programme is managed by John Parsonage. The phased approach, called 'Adaptive Pathways', allows funds to be granted for works which can be reliably forecast as necessary, while leaving options open to respond later as further data allows more reliable estimates of impacts resulting from sea level rise.
- Funding applications will be made to DEFRA, and it is they who will decide whether and how much to fund.
- Funding is a challenge to obtain with so many demands made on the public purse
- The rules have changed recently so that, if approved, the first £3m does not require local funding, however funding is easier to obtain if EA can show that contributions will be made from other agencies and/or private donations.
- EA expects the cost of raising the wall to exceed the amount quoted by Haskoning
- Bidding is an annual process. The application preparation will start now and be submitted in May 2027. A decision announcement called an 'Indicative Allocation' would then normally be expected in September 2027 and, if approved, money would be received, and expenditure could begin in April 2028. Responding to CC's question, AT then explained a typical project implementation sequence.
- The first stage expenditure covering probably a period of about one year (say 2028-2029) would include an options appraisal of alternative technical solutions, and the preparation of supporting reports, surveys, and regulatory submissions (possibly including a Full Planning Application, and Marine Management authorisation) as required.
- Complete construction documents would then be prepared, tenders obtained and other pre-construction activities undertaken, in all usually taking at least another year (say 2029-2030).
- If tenders were satisfactory, and with appropriate government and partnership funding in place, construction would then take place, likely taking at least another year or so (say 2030-2033)
- AT stressed that the above periods could be extended significantly to align with available funds or respond to changes in design or forecasting parameters.
- AT then spoke about the period before a decision was made and agreed we should meet John Parsonage (JP) at Worthing. CC explained that our previous contact with JP had resulted in agreement that further work was needed, but the rate of progress was

dependent on the availability of 'Grant in Aid' funds and EA staff resources, both of which were in short supply.

Further discussion took place regarding what to SWWP seemed an exceedingly long programme. AT said it will be 2 years to get funding and then perhaps 6-8 years to complete the work. He emphasised that village contributions and pledges will improve our chances of succeeding in obtaining DEFRA funding, but this would be between September 2027 and April 2028 at the earliest.

AT suggested that we need a plan to maintain the existing wall for, say, 5 years with full completion of stage one (the proposed 4.5mAOD wall) and all peripheral work taking a further 5 years if funding is approved.

JD explained that in the meantime we need with to meet John Parsonage, Asset Performance Team Leader, who covers the area from Chichester to East Hampshire, to bring the standard of protection of the existing wall up to the required standard.

CC asked if the Itchenor community can offer extra funding to expedite the EA maintenance works programme? AT said that the EA cannot have the JP team being "bought for hire." CC then asked if Itchenor could do some of the work that would normally be included in the EA's scope? AT thought we could. He referred to an EA booklet called "Owning a Watercourse" which he will send SWWP. He said that the booklet applies to sea defences as well as watercourses. If the work is done privately the owner will need an EA permit. He noted that an "improvement" is considered in a different way from routine maintenance. The permit covers an improvement. Depending on the scope, it would be advisable to ask CDC if there is a need to apply for planning permission to carry out the work.

CC had noted that we had sent five questions to EA in advance of the meeting. Discussions had been very helpful and had already provided information in regards to Question 1, on the scope and timing of maintenance, and Question 3, where EA had agreed to act as the RMA for the Sea Wall project. AT also noted, thereby answering Question 2, that they would coordinate the detailed planning application but it would only be done following the 'options appraisal' and determination of available funds for the Stage 1 project, and all understood that partner funding would expedite the process. Question 4, which asked generally about partnership funding had been explored and it was clear that funding from outside sources would be required both prior and for construction.

AT then responded to our Question 5 about the legal situation regarding liability for and performance of the wall since it was located on private land. AT said that riparian owners do not have to do maintenance but if others experience loss or damage as a result of the lack of maintenance, the riparian owner may be sued. The EA cannot force an owner to maintain or raise the sea wall. They can only enforce a wrong action taken by an owner. Nothing that EA does to the Wall will change the ownership or liability status.

CC requested JD to organise the meeting with John Parsonage that had been previously been mentioned.

CC asked for further clarity regarding applying for funding. AT cautioned that if a bid is made by EA next May, and if we are successful and receive money in April 2028, we must still await approval that the solution recommended in our application is deemed to be the correct one. Until that decision is made, any funds put up by partners to expedite studies, outline design, and the application process we will be at risk.

CC asked about the Snow Hill Creek, which had been funded by a partnership between the EA and local charities and individuals. Did it set a useful precedent? AT said he would look at the history of that work.

A short discussion on how to formalise contributions to EA followed. Small sums of say £10,000 would only need a "contribution letter". We asked if there is a "pro-forma"? AT said they would enquire. CC explained a little more about the proposed village environmental charity. AT noted that a private landowner could carry out maintenance.

CC then summed up as follows:

- SWWP thanked AT and JD for agreeing to take this WIPC Pre-App approved proposal forward for funding, and acting as RMA
- SWWP understood the '10-year' timeline
- SWWP understood the need to work closely with John Parsonage on urgent maintenance work to the existing wall; and will explore further whether we can we help by doing and/or paying for some of the work
- SWWP understand that we will need 'contribution letters' from residents and/or the charity, initially in support of the 'indicative allocation' application.

AT closed by explaining that the EA works are carried out under "permissive powers" which do not change the responsibility when the work is finished; that the owners still have responsibility. The EA have the power to do whatever they consider necessary to manage a sea defence.

SWWP agreed to send a note of what was exchanged between us for agreement.

Meeting closed at 3.30pm